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THE PREACHER'S COMMENTARY

ON

I. and II. PETER, I. II. and III. JOHN, JUDE, and THE REVELATION OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE

THE

Preacher's Complete Homiletical

COMMENTARY

ON THE

NEW TESTAMENT

(ON AN ORIGINAL PLAN)

With Critical and Explanatory Notes, Indices, &c., &c.

BY

VARIOUS AUTHORS

New York
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HOMILETICAL COMMENTARY

ON THE

GENERAL EPISTLES OF I. AND II. PETER, I. II. AND III. JOHN, JUDE,

AND

THE REVELATION

OF

ST. JOHN THE DIVINE

BY

REV. ROBERT TUCK, B.A. (LOND.)

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PREACHER'S HOMILETICAL COMMENTARY.

THE FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF PETER.

INTRODUCTION.

It is generally accepted that the apostle Peter was the author of this first epistle, and indeed this may be admitted as beyond reasonable dispute. But when he wrote it, where he wrote it, and for whom he wrote it, can only be conjectured. Much might be settled if we could be sure that St. Peter visited, and for a time resided in, Rome. What seems to be clear is, that the epistle was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70; and a very probable date is A.D. 64, immediately before the Neronian persecution. The epistle mentions Babylon as the place of the author's residence at the time; but Babylon may be a figurative name for Rome. Babylon is, in a mystical way, put for Rome by Papias. Those addressed in the letter are the "dispersed" in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, but many of the churches in these provinces were founded by St. Paul, and are known to have contained Gentile converts; and some of the counsels of the epistle have distinct application to Gentile-Christian, rather than Jewish-Christian conditions, so we must understand the apostle to address the Christian Churches generally, but to write as the Apostle of the Circumcision, with special interest in the Jewish members. The difficulties which St. Paul met with from the Judaising teachers would be more serious in relation to the *Jewish* than to the *Gentile* sections of the Churches; and it was, therefore, a distinct support of St. Paul's position, that the Apostle of the Circumcision should send to the Churches of the "Dispersion,"

independently, precisely the same teachings and counsels. Perhaps the most striking thing in this epistle is, the moral support which it virtually, though not openly, gives to the teaching of the Apostle of the Gentiles. There is no more difference between St. Paul and St. Peter than between St. Paul and St. James.

Simon Peter—A Character-Study.

Simon Peter is, in every way, the most prominent of the personal disciples of the Lord Jesus. His companion disciples, and even John his friend, make but a vague and indistinct impression upon us. The only man whom we seem to know, until St. Paul appears upon the scene, is this man Peter. There must have been something in his natural disposition and character which our Lord immediately recognised, and in which He saw the possibilities of a noble life and noble service. But Peter's character is not an easy one to estimate, because the things which lie on the surface of his story, and are evident to the casual observer, are not the revealing things, they are only indications of the weak sides of a really strong man. And yet to one who is skilful in reading human character, Peter's weaknesses are the suggestion of his strength, and they set the character-reader upon searching for the noble things that must have been in the man who could be so foolish, and so weak. Impulsive he was; he constantly made mistakes by speaking before he had thought. But a man must have something in him to be impulsive; there are energy and enterprise in the man who speaks at once, and he will learn by-and-bye wisdom and self-restraint.

The life-story of Peter should be well before the mind, in its completeness, and in its details, when an effort is made to appraise his character. It is so easy to misjudge a character when only certain actions are taken into the purview. Every man has a right to demand that his character shall be estimated in the light that his entire life throws upon it. Every man who has energy at all does some foolish things sometimes, just as Peter did, and just as David did; but the man's life can never be read aright by him who keeps his eye fixed exclusively on those few foolish things. Even the great Moses sometimes spake unadvisedly with his lips; and the apostle Paul had to apologise for unguarded speech. Peter's life as a whole will be found to reveal the good things of his nature, the great possibilities which did get cultured into a noble life of noble service. When we commune with the almost sanctified Peter of these epistles, we easily forget, or at least put into their proportionate place, the little weaknesses and mistakes which, almost always, leaned to virtue's side.

We know the name of Peter's father; it was Jona, or Jochanan, represented by our John. Tradition gives the name of his mother as Joanna. The family belonged to the western Bethsaida, which is identified as the modern *Ain et Tabigah*, near Chorazin and Capernaum. As the father is never introduced in the narrative, it is assumed that Peter and Andrew his brother were early left orphans, and were brought up by Zebedee and Salome with their two lads James and John, Peter thus beginning in early life that personal friendship with John, which proved such a power for blessing to the end of his days. The

four young men received the ordinary Jewish education, which was mainly, if not exclusively, concerned with the Scriptures, and could not fail to excite in their minds a great interest in the coming of the long-promised Messiah. The four eventually became partners in the business of fishermen, and the energy and promptitude of Peter soon brought to him the foremost position as leader. When he is introduced in the gospels, Peter was residing at Capernaum, with his wife and wife's mother, and he was in very tolerable circumstances, his social status not being at all represented by that of the fisher-folk of the western world.

With his daily companions, he had been much excited by the appearance of John the Baptist; he had evidently submitted to his rite and enrolled himself among his disciples. But Peter was not with Andrew and John on that memorable day when the sight of Jesus seemed to inspire John the Baptist, and led him to cry out, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." Andrew at once thought how deeply interested his brother would be in their discovery of the Messiah. He sought him out, and brought him to Jesus. In a moment, He who "knew what was in man," read this man, and fixed his estimate of his character in one significant word, "Thou shalt be called Cephas"—the Rock-man.

The four companions returned to their business, and some time elapsed before Christ called them to personal attendance upon Him. This He did in connection with the miraculous draught of fishes, bidding them follow Him, that He might make them fishers of men. From this time Peter seems to have been in daily, unbroken contact with His Master; becoming passionately attached to Him, wholly devoted to Him, and almost jealous of Him, unable to bear anything that seemed a slight to Him, or even to hear Him speak in what seemed a hopeless way about Himself. A natural leader himself, he always seemed to expect that Jesus would say and do just what *he* would say and do if he were Jesus. That enthusiastic admiration for Jesus provides the explanation of many of Peter's impulsive acts, and confessions, and mistakes, such as his walking on the water, acknowledging the Messiahship, resisting the idea of Christ suffering, asking to have tents built on the Mount, and professing such brave things in the upper room. He did not know his sides of weakness and peril; he had to learn what those were by bitter and humiliating experiences, in Gethsemane, and in the Judgment Hall. But he recovered himself in a way that told how really firm, and strong, and rock-like his nature was; and when he had received his full restoration from his Divine Lord, he started upon a new career—not yet quite free from his weaknesses, but marvellously developed in self-restraint—naturally leader of the apostolic company, chosen to preach the first gospel sermons, to endure the first persecutions for Christ's sake, and to open the door of gospel privileges for the free admission of believing Gentiles as well as Jews.

Traditions have gathered round his later story. He is said to have founded the church at Antioch, and to have been an evangelist, carrying the glad tidings even to distant Parthia. Wholly uncertain traditions associate Peter with Rome. There is no historical record of any kind to prove that he was

ever in that city. He is said to have been martyred there; and though we can have no confidence in the legend of his death, it beautifully rounds off the brief sketch of Peter's life which has been given. When Nero began his persecutions, the disciples urged Peter to flee, and he left the city by the Appian Way. A little way beyond the Porta Capena he saw his Master's form, and he asked him, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" and from His lips there came these words, "I go to Rome to be crucified yet again." The apostle felt the rebuke, turned his steps back, and was soon afterwards taken and thrown into the Tullianum, or Mamertine prison. There, in what is now the crypt-like chapel of *S. Pietro in carcere*, he converted his gailors, and a spring of fresh water burst out of the ground that he might baptize them. The day of execution came, and St. Peter, whose wife had suffered martyrdom before him, and had been strengthened by his exhortations, was taken to the height of the Janiculum, or Transtiberine region, and, on the spot now marked by a small circular chapel in the churchyard of *S. Pietro in Montorio*, suffered the punishment which the Romans inflicted on slaves and outlaws and barbarians, and was nailed to the cross. He desired, in the intensity of his humility, something that would make his death more ignominious and shameful than his Master's, and at his own request he was crucified head downwards. So at last he gained the martyr's crown. When all was over, the body was interred in the catacombs outside the city on the Appian Way—probably in those known as the Catacombs of S. Callistus (*after Plumptre*).

We can divide Peter's life into three periods for the more careful examination which is necessary if we would estimate his character aright:—1. His personal relations with the Lord Jesus. 2. His grievous and humiliating fall. 3. His devoted service as chief apostle.

With the first period of Peter's career kept before the mind, we may inquire: **I. What led to his selection by our Divine Lord for discipleship and apostleship?** The selections which God makes for service are always based on His recognition of abilities, or character, or latent possibilities. Divine selections as mere acts of Divine sovereignty are not illustrated in any Scripture instance, and it is not honouring to God to assume that He ever acts on what in man we call self-will. There are grounds of wisdom and good judgment for every Divine action. The basis on which selections are made are shown plainly in many prominent cases, in order that we may fully recognise the Divine rule which works in every case. Men are as precisely fitted to the smaller places of service as we can see that they are to the greater and more prominent ones. To every disciple Jesus can say, "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you." Abraham was selected as the new race-head on account of his character. The root principle, the key-note, of faith in the one unseen God was the recognised fitness for his mission. Moses was selected for his position of natural leadership on account of the organising and ruling abilities with which he was endowed; and David was anointed for a future kingship because, though he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance, there were in him the possibilities, which the discipline of life would develop into an unusual regal

efficiency. It must be true of each one of the twelve first disciples of the Lord Jesus. They must be regarded as distinctly selected men, chosen on a sufficient basis of insight and judgment. And this must even be true of Judas Iscariot. The records preserved concerning these twelve men are so slight that we cannot be said to know any of them thoroughly, and some of them we scarcely know at all, and we cannot therefore, with any detail, set forth the ground of selection in each case. But we can sufficiently recognise their leading characteristics, so as to form them into three very distinct groups. Art has endeavoured to reproduce the individuality of these twelve men, but its creations show how imperfect our knowledge of their character, their *personnel*, is. Art has to depend on their offices, their relations, and the Church traditions preserved concerning them.

Leonard Limousin executed a series of enamels for the church of St. Peter at Chartres. The twelve are there represented with the following insignia; St. Peter with the keys, as commissioned (according to Roman Catholic ideas) with the power to bind and to loose; St. Paul with a sword, as a soldier of Christ, armed with the "sword of the Spirit"; St. Andrew with a cross shaped as the letter X, the form of the cross on which he is supposed to have been martyred; St. John with a chalice, in allusion to the words, "Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" (Matt. xx. 23). St. James the Less with a book and a club, in allusion to the supposed manner of his death. St. James the Elder with a pilgrim's staff, a broad hat with scallop shells, and a book, he being regarded as the patron of pilgrims. St. Thomas with an architect's square, as patron of architects and builders. St. Philip with a small cross, the staff of which is knotted like a reed, and indicates the traveller's staff, and marks the apostle as the preacher of Christ crucified to *distant* nations. St. Matthew with a pike (or spear). St. Matthias with an axe. St. Bartholomew with a book and a knife. St. Simon with a saw. These indicating the different modes of their death, according to the legendary accounts.

The three groups into which the twelve men naturally divide, each group containing four men, have been skilfully explained by T. T. Lynch. 1. There are four men who were born leaders. These may be called the Boanergic Group, and the type is given in Peter. 2. There are four men who were born doubters. This may be called the Critical Group, and the type is given in Thomas. 3. There are four others who were born men of business. This may be called the Practical Group, and the type is given in Judas.

Our Lord recognised this born leadership in Peter at once, on the occasion of His first introduction to him. Oftentimes we, in a very striking way, form immediate impressions of those with whom we are casually brought into contact; but we constantly have to correct those first impressions as we become more intimate with those whose characters we thus hastily judge. But the Divine Lord not only read character quickly; he read it truly, so that His impressions never needed any after correction.

What, then, did Jesus at once see in Simon? What was revealed to Him at once as the key-note of Simon's character? It may very well be that his face was a strong one, and the pose of his body indicated physical energy and vigour. He

was evidently a man all alive, who delighted in activity and enterprise, and by the force of his energy was carried into the foremost place in whatever work he undertook. It was this that Jesus at once saw, and sealed by calling him the "Rock-man." It was not his impulsiveness or his unsteadiness—these are the things which most impress *us*, who are so quick to see the evil—it was the active moral trength of the man, that showed him to be a man worth disciplining for noble service. Our Lord saw a man who was firm, vigorous, steadfast; who took a strong hold of things, and gripped tight. *Lücke* describes Simon's character well, as "that firmness or hardness of power which, if not purified, easily becomes violence." *Dean Plumptre* gives a very fair estimate, though he scarcely can be said to appraise worthily that strength of character in which lay such great possibilities. He says: "Through all the scenes of his life we see the natural character of the man breaking out ever and anon, and showing its evil and its good. He is foremost in his confession, and the first to retract; he alone throws himself into the waves to join the loved Form that he saw through the darkness of the night, and then, his faith failing him, begins to sink; prominent in all questionings and murmurings, impetuous, zealous, but also wavering and inconstant; in years a man, but in character a wayward boy, needing the education of a Divine Guide."

Impulsiveness is certainly a main characteristic of Simon Peter. But impulsiveness may either be the sign of a weak nature, and then it is mere restlessness; or it may be the sign of a strong nature, and then it is energy and enterprise. It is usual to think of Peter as impulsively *weak*; he should be thought of as impulsively strong, decided, resolute, and in danger of becoming merely stubborn. He could make prompt and quick decisions, and, like all such men, though usually right, he sometimes made terrible mistakes. Jesus saw in him exactly the nature that needed discipline, that was worth disciplining, and that could be developed into the foremost man, the "Rock-man," in the spiritual kingdom that He was about to establish.

That selection of Peter has its lessons for us. The secret still of selection for service in Christ's Church is the Divine Master's insight of our characters and possibilities. 1. We wonder why some men are put in positions of high trust. The Master saw possibilities of fitness. 2. We wonder why we are not put in positions of high trust. The Master's estimate of us differed from our estimate of ourselves. 3. We wonder why we are in the positions that we are. The Master discerned our fitness, and we should be happier men if we fully accepted His decisions concerning us. To men we are only what we *seem* to be. To ourselves we are only what we *feel* to be. To Christ we are what we may become; and He proposes to train the possibilities.

II. **What brought round to Peter his time of testing and peril?**—The story of his failure and fall needs to be read between the lines, and with a good deal of sympathetic consideration. Two things must be kept in mind: (1) His intense, enthusiastic, almost extravagant attachment to Christ; and (2) that spirit of leadership—that natural power of ruling—which even strove to make Jesus go Peter's way. The truth is, that it was very hard indeed for Peter to be, and to

keep, second to Jesus. He was constantly making up his mind what Jesus ought to do, and how He ought to do it. And Jesus did not go Peter's way. It was very hard for a man with the disposition of Peter to be compelled to keep second. And we can hardly wonder if, in the prolonged fight, he did sometimes fail and fall. He must have struggled again and again with himself to keep faith in Christ as he did. And that last great strain time came when he was bodily over-wrought, when he was annoyed, disappointed, angry with himself, angry with everybody else. Nothing was going "according to his mind." He had been reproved by his Master before the other apostles in the Upper Room; he was annoyed at his falling asleep in Gethsemane, after having made such protestations of devotion; and he had again come under the severe reproof of his Master when he slashed away so impulsively with his sword in the time of the arrest. If ever a man was in a bad mood, Peter was. Many a man, feeling as Peter did that day, would have gone away and sulked. Being strong, not weak, Peter did not do that, but followed the arresting party, and gained entrance into the high priest's palace, resolutely determined to see the end. There, caught at unawares, he denied with oaths and curses. Only a strong man could fall so terribly as Peter did that day.

And we may learn: 1. That the providential discipline of every life is adjusted to character. 2. That the greatness of a moral fall is no proof of the exceptional badness of a man. It may only tell of a strong nature which calls for severe remedies. 3. For most of us the wonder of life is, that God succeeds in accomplishing so much sanctifying by such mild testings, such limited afflictions, and so few falls.

III. **What gave Peter his power and place and influence in the Early Church?**—For the foremost place and power Peter gained at once when his Master passed from mortal vision among the clouds of Olivet. He simply *took it*, and nobody ever thought of disputing his right, or rivalling his claim. Neither St. Paul nor St. John ever presumed to take the first place. It belonged to Peter. He was *facile princeps*. In the Upper Room he led in the matter of filling the vacant apostleship. At Pentecost he stepped forward to explain the mysterious signs. He opened the door of the gospel to the Gentile believers.

But it was not just that man who had been found by his brother and led to Jesus and given the Cephas name. It was that man, and with all his natural characteristics still strong upon him. But it was that man after he had come through the humiliating, disciplinary experiences of life. It was that man after he had been for some time in the Christ-school—that school in which man learns the supreme lesson of self-restraint, the mastery and wise use of his own powers. He had his work when he was made ready for the doing of it. "When thou art converted"—with the second, the Christian conversion—"strengthen thy brethren. Recovered from a self-revealing fall; a humbled and gentle and sympathetic man—'Feed My lambs.'" That is the great secret of power still, the secret of Christ's own power, for "the Captain of our salvation was made perfect through suffering," perfectly efficient for His sublime and blessed work—the bringing on of many sons unto glory.

Learn two lessons: 1. Have you nothing to do for God? (It is not so, but are you thinking that it is?) Then you may fear that there is nothing in you that is worth disciplining into efficiency. 2. Have you high trusts for God, noble places, almost overwhelming responsibilities? Then there must be possibilities in you which your Divine Master has recognised, which make you worth all the stern, all the humiliating, all the afflictive discipline which you may have to undergo. "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." It was worth while training such a man as Peter.

Peter's Earlier Teachings.

It is not merely a matter of interest to inquire how far St. Peter was consistent with himself, or how far he had gone in intellectual apprehension and spiritual appreciation of the Christian truth; it is distinctly helpful to the proper understanding, and to the skilful homiletic treatment, of his epistle that we should know what points of the Christian truth first arrested his attention, absorbed his interest, and found expression in his ministry as the first gospel preacher. This subject has been skilfully treated by the *Rev. Owen James*, and his chief points may be presented.

When Jesus died the Christian religion had no outward form or organisation. During His life He taught new truths, set up new ideals, awakened new aspirations, and established new hopes; but He did not organise His followers into a society separate and distinct from Judaism. After the resurrection, during the forty days, He continued His instruction on points bearing especially on the nature of the heavenly kingdom.

The process of giving an external organisation to Christianity may be said to have begun on the day of Pentecost. This process was a gradual one—was, indeed, a growth. In this growth we can easily distinguish five phases:—1. A doctrinal growth, *i.e.* a growth in the apostles' understanding of Christianity. 2. A numerical growth, *i.e.* an increase in the number of those who held Christian beliefs. 3. A separative growth—*i.e.* a process by which the Christians were expelled from the Jewish body, and organised into a new and distinct body. 4. A structural growth, *i.e.* a process by which this new Christian body developed within itself its own functions, and its own organs. 5. A dispersive growth, *i.e.* a process by which the Christian society not only came into existence, but also reproduced itself in every part of the Roman empire.

Thus there was a growth in the individual; from one individual to another; a separation of these individuals into a class; structural growth within the class; a multiplication of the class throughout the world. These processes were, of course, independent, and each was in part the effect, and in part the cause, of all the others.

The doctrinal growth was from Peter, through Stephen to Paul and John. It has thus its four stages: Petrine, Stephanic, Pauline, and Johannine.

Peter was a Jew. He shared in the Jewish hopes and prejudices, conformed

to the Jewish ritual, and lived a Jewish life. His idea of the Messianic kingdom was that in form it would be earthly and Jewish. The crucifixion dispersed all the expectations of Peter, and overwhelmed him with despair. But the resurrection, the intercourse and meditations of the forty days, the ascension, and the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, were events whose logic reset his views. He saw that the Jewish nation had crucified in the person of Jesus its Lord and Messiah. Peter has not ceased to be a Jew. But he is a Jew who believes that the Messiah has already come, that the nation, not being prepared for Him, killed Him, and that for this reason He has, for the present, gone back to heaven. When Peter declared this publicly there was great consternation. The multitudes cried, "Brethren, what shall we do?" That is, How shall we avert the consequences of our unpreparedness for the Messiah, and our consequent rejection and crucifixion of Him? They are commanded to do two things: 1. "Repent ye." 2. "Be baptized, every one of you, into the name of Jesus the Messiah." He does not use the word "Repentance" in the modern metaphysico-theological sense. He tells the Jews simply that they must resolve to cease from their wicked doings, and to give scrupulous obedience to the law, as faithful Jews. That was one thing they must do. Then they were to be baptized into the name of Jesus, upon the basis of their conviction and avowal that He was the Messiah. He requires, therefore, the acceptance of Jesus as Messiah, and a formal expression of this acceptance by baptism.

The repentance, the naming of Jesus as Messiah, and the baptism into this name, were with a view to two objects—the remission of sins, and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. Remission of sins is here used in its objective and not in its subjective sense. Peter is not thinking of that Divine act in which God acquits man of sin. He is thinking rather of averting the calamitous consequences of sinning, and he has a special series of calamities in his mind.

Shortly after the Day of Pentecost Peter addressed the multitudes that had assembled in Solomon's porch. Here, again, repentance, turning again, blotting out of sin, are pre-requisite, and upon them is conditioned the coming of the seasons of refreshing. The exhortations of the second address are given from a different point of view. In the first address the main object in view is to avert the destruction which the Messiah will inflict on those unprepared for Him. In the second address the main object in view is to secure the speedy return of the Messiah.

Addressing the Sanhedrin, Peter's point is that Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Sanhedrin had crucified, was the true Messiah, the only Messiah which the nation would ever have; that God had raised Him from the dead; and that in His name the lame man was healed.

Again addressing the Sanhedrin, Peter says in closing: "Him as Prince and Saviour did God exalt at His right hand to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins." That is, God raised Jesus, who was a Prince and Saviour, unto His right hand in order to give to Israel time and opportunity for repentance and forgiveness. Rather than destroy the nation at once because of its rejection of the Messiah, God had raised the Messiah unto His right hand in order that

the nation might be brought to repentance, and through repentance to the forgiveness of sins.

Recapitulating the four addresses of Peter recorded in the first part of the Acts, we learn, according to the above exposition:—

1. That Peter was a true and faithful Jew.

2. That in his mind the Messianic kingdom was earthly and political, but based on pure morality and fervent piety. The benefits of the kingdom were to be in part worldly, and in part spiritual. The Holy Spirit was to be poured out on all classes of Jews. On the other hand, the Messiah was to destroy with a terrible destruction the immoral, the impious, and the hostile to Himself among the nation.

3. The Messiah had already come, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

4. The nation, not being prepared for Him, had crucified Him.

5. God had raised Him from the dead, and had exalted Him to a place at His right hand in heaven.

6. The crucifixion, death, and resurrection of the Messiah had for their efficient cause the sins of the people; for their formal cause the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God; but concerning their final cause, Peter is silent. That is, Peter mentions no purpose that God had in His counsel that the Messiah should be a suffering one.

The Messiah had been exalted to heaven not only because the people were unprepared for Him, but also in order to give the nation time and opportunity to become prepared for Him.

8. When the nation should be sufficiently prepared, the Messiah would again appear to establish the kingdom and destroy the unprepared remnant.

9. Preparedness for the Messiah produced an individual and a national result: (1) For the nation it accelerated the setting up of the Messianic kingdom with all its national blessings. (2) For the individual it effected a removal from a hostile class to a friendly class, from a class that was to be destroyed to a class that was to be blessed; it averted the destruction and secured the salvation which the coming of the Messiah brought. In other words, preparedness for the Messiah resulted to the individual in the forgiveness of sins, and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit.

10. This preparedness consisted in reformation of moral and religious conduct (repentance); in naming Jesus as Messiah (faith); and in being baptized into this name (confession). The import of this baptism is threefold; it expressed acceptance of Jesus as Messiah, it was a formal committal of self to Jesus as Messiah, and it changed the class of the baptized. It was a confession, it was a pledge, and it identified the confessing and pledging person with the disciples. He became a disciple by this very act. This was the mark that classified him outwardly.

11. This preparedness was to be produced by the disciples through their testimony and preaching, and through the confirming of their testimony by the Holy Spirit.

Such seem to have been the beliefs of the Christians during the early Petrine period.

St. Peter's Acquaintance with St. Paul's Epistles.

At some time or other in the later period of St. Peter's life, we must think of him as coming into contact for the first time with what must have been a new treasure of wisdom and knowledge, equivalent almost to a new apocalypse of truth. During the thirty years or so that had passed since the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the two, St. Peter and St. Paul, had but seldom met. True, St. Peter had once heard in brief outline the substance of the gospel which St. Paul preached to the Gentiles (Gal. ii. 2). True, he had publicly recognised his teaching and his work; but after this there had been an interval of separation and distrust, for a time even of actual antagonism, brought about by ignorance and misrepresentation. During all these years the only time in which he listened to St. Paul's voice was when he spoke in sharp reproof at Antioch. We have no reason to think it likely that any of St. Paul's epistles had at that time come within his reach. But now, in his old age, he came in contact with Silvanus, who for years had been St. Paul's companion, who was joined with him in the salutations to the churches of Thessalonica, who possibly acted as his amanuensis in writing the Epistle to the Romans. From him, therefore, St. Peter may well have obtained a copy of some, at least, of the great epistles in which the teaching of the Apostle of the Gentiles has come down to us for an everlasting possession. Can we not picture to ourselves the flood of new feelings and thoughts which would rush in upon his soul as he sat and read them? Delight to find a heart that beat so entirely in unison with his own, loving Christ as he himself loved Him, a truth essentially the same, though presenting here and there different phases, and including some things hard to be understood—a new warmth of affection towards the "beloved brother Paul," who, when they last met, had reproved him so sharply—wider thoughts, it may be, than he had before known as to the mystery of Christ, and the hidden symbolism of the types and shadows of the law—all these are traceable in his epistles; and this also, the influence of the teaching of St. Paul on the mind of St. Peter, would well repay a distinct and full inquiry.

With such fruits fresh gathered into the garner of his old age, with a mind illumined at once by a long experience and by the guidance of the Spirit of Truth, soaring far above the strife and contention with which party and faction had sought to identify his name, looking back upon the past, to the days when his Lord had been with him upon earth, and he saw His glory, and listened to His words, looking forward to the time as already near when he would have to put off this tabernacle, as that Lord had showed him—all the fear, and vacillation, and self-confidence of the natural man, the Simon Bar-Jona, having passed away—the true Peter, at last worthy of his name, sends forth the great encyclical epistles, which were then the stay and bulwark of the Church against the hosts of dark and dangerous errors, and which continue to give light to all seekers after truth, and comfort to all penitents and mourners.—*Dean Plumptre.*

St. Peter's Ministry in Rome.

The most that can be said of the evidence for this is that it leaves it fairly probable that St. Peter ended his life at Rome. Of the twenty-five years of his Episcopate, and of his having thus been the first of a long line of Pontiffs, there is not the shadow of any evidence till we come to Eusebius himself, who states that Peter followed Simon Magus to Rome in the reign of Claudius (A.D. 41), and there defeated him. He does not give the details of the defeat, but wraps them in a vague rhetoric. The true source of the Petrine legend are, accordingly, not to be found in the early fathers of the church, nor in any local tradition of an earlier date than the latter part of the second century. Their starting point is found in the elaborate apocrypha of the Ebionite heretics.—*Dean Plumptre.*

CHAPTER I.

THE PRESENT POWER OF THE FUTURE SALVATION.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1. **Peter.**—This may be called his official, his apostolic name, as distinguished from his personal name Simon, or Simeon. Christ gave it to mark His estimate of his character; it has come to indicate his office. **Apostle.**—That is, one directly called, commissioned, and sent, by Jesus Christ Himself. Compare the name "servant," given to themselves by James and Jude, which suggests, and seems to imply, that they were not apostles in the first sense of the term. **Jesus Christ.**—As St. Peter writes mainly to Jews, this name is significant as assuming the recognised Messiahship of Jesus. He is Jesus *the Messiah*. **Strangers.**—ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις; chosen strangers, or elect sojourners of the Dispersion. Compare John vii. 35, "the dispersion of the Greeks," which must mean the "dispersed Jews who live among the Greeks." Here "the dispersed of Pontus," etc., means "the dispersed Jews who live in these countries." Strangers is a confusing word; sojourners is better. Jerusalem is thought of as the Jews' home; anywhere else he is a sojourner. The tone of the epistle is adapted to the Jew, and especially to the foreign-dwelling Jew. The countries mentioned are provinces of Asia Minor. The particular occasion of the letter is not indicated even by its contents.

Ver. 2. **Elect.**—The usual idea of the Jews as a nation. But Peter intimates that the Christian Jews were elect in a new sense. "The word and the thought that the disciples of Christ are what they are by the election or choice of God characterises the whole teaching of the New Testament." **Foreknowledge.**—Plumptre says that the word hovers between a mere "prevision of the future" and the higher sense in which "knowing" means "loving" and "approving," as in 1 Cor. viii. 3; Gal. iv. 9, and probably Rom. viii. 29, xi. 2. **God the Father.**—St. Peter's clear conception of the *Sonship* of Christ gave him a clear and strong impression of the Fatherhood of God. **Through sanctification of the Spirit.**—Which practically carries out the electing purpose of God. "Separating," rather than "making holy," is the idea of sanctification here, after the familiar meaning of the term to Jews. Compare "consecration." The election of God, as a Divine purpose, realised or manifested itself in their being separated from the world, and set apart as consecrated ones. **Unto obedience.**—The response of the consecrated one to the grace of his separation. To secure such obedience is the purpose of God's election, and the work of the sanctifying Spirit. So the obedience of the Jewish nation was the proper response to the national election. **Sprinkling of the blood.**—Which bears direct relation to infirmities in the obedience of the sanctified ones, as is even more clearly expressed in 1 John i. 7. It should be noticed that this cleansing and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus is applied to those who *are* Christian, who are separated or sanctified. "The daily being sprinkled by Christ's blood, and so cleansed from all sin" (*Fausset*). **Grace . . . peace.**—By peace is meant that inward composure of mind which attends upon the experience of electing grace. "Peace" is the old Hebrew salutation; the addition of "grace" makes it a Christian salutation.

Ver. 3. **Blessed be.**—A characteristic Jewish recognition of God's mercy. Compare with 2 Cor. i. 3; Eph. i. 3. **Abundant.**—πολύ, much. **Begotten us.**—The choice of the nation is thought of as its first Divine birth; the call into gospel privileges is thought of as a new and second Divine birth (see John iii. 5; Titus iii. 5; James i. 18). **Lively hope.**—Living hope. "A life in which hope is the energising principle" (*Alford*). *Macknight's* note is suggestive: "Believers of all nations are begotten to the hope of a new life after death, through the covenant of grace made with our first parents after the Fall. In the same hope they are begotten a second time, through the resurrection of Christ from the dead." **By the resurrection.**—Here St. Peter speaks from his own personal experiences. The great revealing time, which brought to *him* the consciousness of a new life, was the resur-

rection of Jesus. Then he believed in Him with a belief that brought to him a new life. *Archbishop Leighton* makes the resurrection the *efficient cause* of our new birth.

Ver. 4. **To an inheritance.**—Still the Jewish national figure is in the mind of St. Peter. That nation was begotten to the inheritance of Canaan; we are begotten to a spiritual inheritance, figured for us as a heavenly Canaan. **Incorruptible**, etc.—"Exuberant description of the excellencies of the new Canaan." **In heaven.**—The heavenly spiritual spheres. Reserved until you were quickened with the new life that could appreciate it. Not future heaven, but present heavenliness.

Ver. 5. **Kept.**—"Who, by virtue of God's power, are under guard." "As the inheritance hath been preserved, so are the heirs guarded; neither shall it fail them, nor they it" (*Bengel*). **Through faith.**—Not intellectual belief, but daily trust, which keeps us in spiritual union with God, and secures the Divine defence. **Unto salvation.**—Full salvation from all the frailties and consequent sorrows of this life; full development of the new life begun in us. **Ready to be revealed.**—A heaven actually prepared. A future that even now may be a spiritual presence. The idea of an *inheritance* gives the character to St. Peter's figures. But heaven must be in man before he can be in heaven.

Ver. 6. **Greatly rejoice.**—The prospect brings all the joy of a present possession. "Salvation is realised by faith as a thing so actually present as to cause exulting joy, in spite of existing afflictions." The rejoicing is in "the whole complex sense of the preceding verses, concerning the hope of glory." **In heaviness.**—Or "ye were grieved, burdened, distressed." **Temptations.**—Troubles, persecutions, regarded as trials or testings of faith (see James i. 2).

Ver. 7. **Trial of your faith.**—"Faith is not known to be what it is until it is tested by suffering." **More precious.**—The faith is meant, not the *trial* of it. Illustration from the severe processes found necessary for the refining of gold. "More valuable than the trial of gold, which is perishable, and that is a fiery trial." **Appearing.**—Better, "revelation." The Early Church's expectation of Christ's coming is very difficult to understand, but it explains many apostolic expressions.

Ver. 8. **Not seen.**—Some MSS. read, "Whom not knowing, ye love." **Love.**—The word of calm and Divinely-given attachment, not the word of warm human friendship. Compare our Lord's commendation of those "who have not seen, yet have believed."

Ver. 9. **Receiving the end.**—Getting now, up to measures of capacity, all the blessings of the salvation. "Their joy and peace in believing constituted a present salvation, the pledge and earnest of final and complete deliverance."

Ver. 10. Read "prophets" without the article. *Plumptre* thinks St. Peter is speaking mainly, though perhaps not exclusively, of the prophets of the Apostolic Church. It is, however, usual to see reference to the prophets of the Old Testament. "All the prophets looked forward with envy to the prize now in their hands." **Have enquired.**—*Calvin* says: "When he states that the prophets inquired and examined, this refers not to their writings or teaching, but to the private longing with which each was fired." (Compare, however, Acts i. 6, 7.)

Ver. 11. **Spirit of Christ.**—If this does not mean the "Messianic Spirit," it would seem to support Plumptre's limitation to New Testament prophets. **Sufferings of Christ.**—τὰ εἰς Χριστὸν παθήματα: the sufferings for Christ, or "which pass on unto Christ." "The sufferings spoken of are those which the disciples were enduring for Christ, and which he thinks of as shared by Him, flowing over to Him" (*Plumptre*).

Ver. 12. **Unto us.**—The better MSS. give "unto you." **Now reported.**—By the Christian teachers and preachers. Application is direct to the Christian Jews of Asia Minor, who were late in receiving the good tidings, but entered into the full heritage of all the good things. **Angels.**—Read without the article.

Ver. 13. **Be sober.**—The word suggests a sobriety of the Nazarite type. **To the end.**—Margin, perfectly; hope with a hope that lacks nothing of completeness.

Ver. 14. **Obedient children.**—Lit. "children of obedience." Read "lusts which were formerly yours in the time of your ignorance"—before the first revelation of Christ was made to you. It is implied that the ignorance is the mother of the lusts. The words are quite as applicable to unregenerate Jews as to unregenerate Gentiles.

Ver. 15. **Conversation.**—Behaviour, conduct; turning about in daily relationships; moving to and fro with others. Swift is the first writer who limits the word to talking. Read the first clause of the verse: "After the pattern of the Holy One who called you."

Ver. 16. **Be ye holy.**—Or future "Ye shall be holy," but with the force of an imperative. For application to Jewish nation see Lev. xi. 44, xix. 2, xx. 26.

Ver. 17. **The Father.**—Better, "a Father." God apprehended as Father through our apprehension of the Sonship of Christ. *Plumptre* reminds us that "the sequel shows this attribute of Fatherhood is not thought of as excluding the idea of judgment, but gives assurance that the judgment will be one of perfect equity." **Sojourning.**—(See ver. 1). **Fear.**—Not dread, but seriousness and self-distrust. "This fear is not cowardice (nor superstition); it drowns all lower fears and begets true fortitude" (*Leighton*).

Ver. 19. **Precious blood.**—Order of the Greek is, "with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (even that) of Christ."

Ver. 20. **Fore-ordained.**—Lit. "foreknown," which, however, implies "fore-ordination." **Last times.**—"At the end of the times."

Ver. 21. **Faith.**—πίστις. Relates to things present which, though invisible, are realised by the eye of the mind. **Hope.**—ἐλπίς. Relates to things in the distant future, which are objects of such loveliness that they fill the heart and engage the affections, as if they were near at hand (*Webster* and *Wilkinson*).

Ver. 22. Good MSS. omit the word "pure."

Ver. 23. **Born again.**—Better, "having been begotten again."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—2.

The Called-out Ones.—The epistle to the Hebrews is evidently written for the Jewish Christians, but it had no direct address or dedication to them. The only epistle besides 1 Peter, addressed to the Jews of the Dispersion, is the epistle of James; and that epistle should be carefully compared with this, in order to discover what common conditions each writer dealt with, and what peculiar perils or weaknesses each noticed.

I. **The Dispersion.**—It is important to mark the distinction between St. James' dedication and St. Peter's. St. James addresses the "twelve tribes which are of the Dispersion," apparently not wishing to press any distinction between Jews and Christian Jews. St. Peter, as is brought out clearly by the Revised Version, addressed only those who, of the Dispersion, had accepted the faith of Christ. "To the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion." There is consequently a general tone on the counsels of St. James, and a precise and specific tone on the counsels of St. Peter. His interest in those to whom he wrote as, like himself, Jews, is evident in the illustrations and references of the epistle; but it is equally evident that St. Peter has in mind those who share with him in a distinctly Christian experience. The term that he uses, "sojourners," suggests that he had not in mind those of the Dispersion who had *settled down* and made their homes in these lands, but rather those who were taking temporary shelter in these lands, because driven from their homes by persecution, or by some prevailing famine or distress. Sojourners of the Dispersion cannot be intended to suggest the Dispersion. As those in flight, and in fear, and in distressing circumstances, St. Peter's assurances and sympathy would be especially comforting to them. He thinks of them as elect ones, called out ones—as those who, in the persuasions of Divine grace, had been led to accept of Jesus as the Messiah and Saviour; to them had been given "like precious faith" with him.

II. **The basis of their call.**—"According to the foreknowledge of God the Father." St. Paul in a similar way says, "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate." The thought is almost peculiarly a Jewish one. It was the genius of that nation to see God's mind, God's purpose, and God's hand in everything. A Jew could not look upon anything without the feeling: God thought it, God meant it, God did it. They were jealous of admitting that anything could ever happen which was not first in the mind of God. And it was quite natural that the Jewish apostles should be jealous of every attempt to separate the new life in Christ from God. The Christian faith and life was no independent thing. Every one who exercised the faith, and received the life, was known of God beforehand, and within all agencies that won the man for Christ was the Divine call, based upon the Divine foreknowledge. "Them He also called." Difficulty is often made by unnecessarily assuming that the Divine foreknowledge involves Divine interference. It is thought that because God foreknew, therefore man could not be left free to act upon motives and judgments. It is even assumed that, all being settled beforehand in the Divine councils, men could be

no other than saved or unsaved, as God arranged for them. But knowledge of what will happen is quite distinct from interfering to make things happen. The Divine eye, searching the ages, may see every one that will accept the offer of salvation in Christ, and yet all the ordinary agencies for the teaching of the truth and the persuading of the will may go on unhindered. God's foreknowledge is a sublime mystery of the Divine nature, which comes comfortingly to Jewish toned souls, but in no way affects man's freedom to act on considerations submitted, or his responsibility for making wise and worthy decisions. Even in the small spheres of family life, parents often feel quite certain how their several children will act under the same circumstances; but that parental knowledge—though it guides parental doings—in no sense interferes with the free expression of themselves by the children.

III. **The method of their call.**—"The sanctification of the Spirit." It is grammatically possible that the reference is not to the Holy Spirit, but to the man's own spirit. And the idea of separation and consecration is that expressed by the one word "sanctification." The call of God is an arousing of the man's spiritual nature into activity. But God working in the spirit of man we recognise as the Holy Spirit. The first idea of sanctifying a man we express as *spiritualising* a man—wakening him to spiritual interests, to attention to spiritual claims and considerations, and to the making of spiritual decisions and resolves. St. Paul says, "Ye which are spiritual." And God's call is a "sanctifying," because it awakens a man, and makes him spiritual. Illustration may be taken from the boy Samuel, who heard God's call, and became *spiritual* from that hour. Or from Saul of Tarsus, who heard God's call, and became *spiritual* from that hour. The proper act of the awakened spiritual life is consecration to God. To that God's Spirit moves the spiritual man. That consecration is his sanctification.

IV. **The purpose of their call.**—"Unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Compare St. Paul's words, "To be conformed to the image of His Son." Obedience is the epitome of right relations between God and His creatures, between the Father and His sons. But it is the spiritual obedience of spiritual men that is referred to; an obedience which is the expression of heart-devotion. By "sprinkling of the blood" may possibly be meant that sense of acceptance with God, that joy of fellowship with God, and that guarantee of maintained relations with God, which comes to us only through the sprinkled blood. The purpose God has in their call is to bring them into that holy life, to which He can respond by giving them fully His Divine favour and friendship. The greeting of this passage, "Grace to you and peace be multiplied!" becomes interesting as the sympathetic greeting of *a specially called one*, called to be "an apostle of Jesus Christ."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 2. *Election.*—We may at once place aside, as having nothing to do with our subject, the question whether God's knowledge of future events practically abolishes human freedom. We know absolutely nothing of the nature of God, excepting what He has revealed, and the question before us simply is, What did the writers of the New Testament mean? Who are the elect and chosen of whom they speak? Are they (whoever they are) arbitrarily chosen according to the determinate counsel of God? and if so, to what are they chosen? The apostles were Jews, and part of their mission was to explain why God should turn away from His elect people, and offer eternal life also to the Gentiles. St. Paul says, God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew, but as in the time of Elijah there was a faithful remnant,

so those whose ears had been opened to hear the word of the gospel were the election of grace, as he calls it, and that they and the Gentiles who had been admitted to the privileges of hearing the word of the gospel through their fall, are now the elect people of God. In Rom. ix., the apostle asserts the power of God to extend His chosen people, and reminds them that God had not acted in His choice of them as the elect people of God upon the principles of bare lineal descent, but that the revelation of His mercy and goodness has not been dependent upon any goodness of theirs, but on His sovereign will and pleasure. Not that God has no reasons, but that "He giveth not account" to His creature man "of any of His matters. God blesses some nations with peculiar blessings which He withholds from others. The Potter makes two vessels; one, the Jewish nation, God saw fit to devote to honour; the other, the Egyptian nation, He devotes to less honour, to make His power known. What were God's favoured nation, the Jews, elected, chosen, predestinated to? Not, surely, final salvation, but to peculiar religious privileges—not to a blessing absolutely, but to a special privilege and advantage, and the offer and opportunity of obtaining temporal blessings, not extended to the other nations of the world, and of having committed to them the oracles of God. The Jews were not chosen for their obedience, for they were a peculiarly disobedient people, and their privileges were made to depend upon their obedience. They were left free to choose between blessing and cursing; a blessing if they attended to the voice of the Lord their God, and a curse if they refused to obey.—*Robert Barclay.*

Election as held by Jews.—The Old Testament containing not only the germs of the doctrine of election in the contraposition of Abraham and the world, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Judah and his brethren, but also the germs of the doctrine of decrees in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and others, not to speak of the book of Ruth, and the book of Job, those grand representative exemplifications of Divine fore-ordination, it was quite natural that the idea of Divine predestination should be found living and active among the Jews, though it was very differently developed in the different systems of Judaism. The Sadducees openly asserted that each man was the master of his own destiny; while the Pharisees, with their mechanical separation of the effects of Divine blessing from the effects of human righteousness, made human destiny depend partly on Divine ordination and partly on human actions. The Essenes, representing that form of Judaism which was most mixed up with paganism, considered destiny as an inevitable fate; the whole idea, however, being peculiarly mitigated by the religious quietism which characterised the sect. The *fate* of Islam is the absolute, arbitrary despotism of Allah; and when the Koran in one place teaches the inevitableness of destiny, and in another the possibility of warding off Divine punishment, it simply contradicts itself. The fatalism of Mohammed referred, probably, only to the infidels; and when to the faithful he preached absolute necessity, with respect to the hour of death, he had probably only a practical purpose in view—to make them good fighters for his religion.—*Herzog's "Encyclopædia."*

Divine Election not Absolute.—What does the word "elect" mean here? Does it refer to an absolute and unconditional election of these Christians to eternal life? Such is the interpretation put upon the word by the followers of Augustine, Calvin, and many other Church teachers; but here, at least, it is otherwise defined. It is an election "unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ"; and indeed, throughout the New Testament its primary signification is God's choice of nations, or of individual men,

to the enjoyment of special privileges (better say duties, obligations, missions), with a view to their eternal salvation if those privileges are rightly used. It is an election according to the foreknowledge of God—that foreknowledge which sees the end from the beginning, which embraces all the events of time, which is acquainted with the actions, lives, and motives, of all men; and which therefore, can never be taken by surprise. But God's foreknowledge is not fore-determination. It does not interfere with human free agency. It does not deal with men as with beings who have no moral responsibility. In what way the thought of man's freedom to will was reconcileable with that of God's electing purpose, the writers of the New Testament did not care to discuss. They felt, we may believe, instinctively, half unconsciously, that the problem was insoluble, and were content to accept the two beliefs, which cannot logically be reconciled. In the words "the foreknowledge of God *the Father*" we find, perhaps, the secret of their acceptance of this aspect of the Divine government. The choice and the knowledge were not those of an arbitrary sovereign will, capricious as are the sovereigns of earth, in its favours and antipathies, seeking only to manifest its power, but of a Father whose tender mercies were over all His works, and who sought to manifest His love to all His children. From that standpoint the "choice" of some to special blessings was compatible with perfect equity to all.—*Dean Plumptre.*

The Election of Christian Jews.—The term "elect" here marks off the *Christian* Jews from the rest of the Jewish settlers in those parts. God selected these particular Hebrews out of the whole number and made them Christians: but *what* He elected them *to* is abundantly shown in the next words.—*A. J. Mason, M.A.*

Sprinkling.—By this word he alludeth to the sacrifices of the law, which all pointed to the sacrifice of Christ; and to show that as it had been nothing that a sacrifice had been killed, unless the blood thereof had been sprinkled upon the people (for so was the manner), so it avails nothing that Christ died, unless His blood be sprinkled upon us by the hand of a true faith, applying Jesus Christ to our consciences. It is not Christ that saves, but Christ's death apprehended by a true and lively faith; for a particular persuasion hereof are we to labour,—*John Rogers*, 1657.

Inauguration by Sprinkling.—Compare Heb. ix. 19, xii. 24. As the people themselves are "sprinkled," and not their houses, the reference cannot be to the Paschal sprinkling (Exod. xii. 22), but, as in Hebrews, to the scene under Mount Sinai, in Exod. xxiv. 8, where, once for all, the old covenant was inaugurated by the sprinkling of the people. (A curious ceremony of sprinkling the people is observed in Madagascar.) It was to the same scene that our Lord referred when He said of the Eucharistic cup, "This is *My* blood of the *new* covenant." Thus "elect unto the sprinkling of the blood," seems to mean, "selected for admission into the new covenant, inaugurated by the sprinkling of Christ's blood." But whereas the old covenant was inaugurated by sprinkling the people collectively and once for all, the new is inaugurated by individual application. Doubtless the participation of the Holy Communion is the act of "sprinkling" here before St. Peter's mind, it being the one act which betokens membership in the new covenant-people, the new Israel.—*A. J. Mason, M.A.*

Daily Sprinkling.—Not sprinkling in justification through the Atonement once for all, which is expressed in the previous clauses, but (as the order proves) the daily being sprinkled by Christ's blood, and so cleansed from all sin, which is the privilege of one already justified, and walking in the light (1 John i. 7, 9, 10; compare Heb. xii. 24; Rev. i. 5, vii. 14).—*Fausset.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 3—12.

Present and Future Salvation.—The similarity between the "blessings" of ver. 3 and the "blessings" of 2 Cor. i. 3; Eph. i. 3, attracts attention, and requires explanation. It is quite possible that the expression, "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," had become fixed in the Early Church as a formula familiarly used; and, if so, we can readily recognise its value as a succinct statement of the primary Christian truths. It affirms that the Christian God is the one and only God, the same God whose unity and spirituality were the sacred trust of the Jewish nation; that this God, having been manifested to men in a Son, and in Sonship, may now be apprehended as the Divine Father; and that what He is to *us* we may learn from what He is to Christ: that Jesus is the Saviour from sin which His name expresses; and that, as Christ, or Messiah, He is sent of God to do that saving work; that He who saves from sin gains the right to rule the saved ones as Lord; and that the relation in which they stand to Him is a distinctly personal one, so that they can call Him "*our* Lord." It is the Christian truth epitomised in the Christian name for God. And it fittingly introduces the references to the salvation which the Father God works by the ministry of "our Lord Jesus Christ."

I. **The life which the Father quickens.**—"Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope." "A life in which hope is the energising principle" (*Alford*). St. Peter is not here referring, generally, to the new birth, and the new life of the soul, but specifically to that new life which comes to men in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. St. Paul's expression helps to explain St. Peter's. He says, "If ye then be risen with Christ"; as if for the believer in Christ there was as truly a fresh life, as there was for Christ after His resurrection. St. Peter is writing to new-born souls, to those who have the life in Christ, and purposes to set before them their Christian privileges and responsibilities. The new life which the Father quickens is a double life; it is a present life of privilege, and it is the hope of a future life of blessedness. It is a living life, in the holy cheer of a living hope. It has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. It is the life of hope which the Father quickens, through the resurrection of Christ, that is St. Peter's great point. That was the truth to cheer persecuted Christians who were driven from their homes, perhaps with the loss of all things. What had they for their comfort, save their Christian hope? If we would understand how this new life of hope comes to us through the resurrection of Jesus, we may consider St. Peter's own experience. That resurrection made him a *new man*. If St. James was our Lord's real brother, as is assumed, his belief in Jesus as the Messiah came as the persuasion of His resurrection, and St. James was "begotten again" through the resurrection. "Mystically speaking, the moment of our emergence into this new glow of expectation was that when the Messiah Jesus, who had been cut off, emerged from among the dead." The believer is born again to this lively hope when the fact of the resurrection is acknowledged, and its significance realised.

II. **The future for which the Father quickens.**—"Unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven." Children are begotten, not only to life, but to the father's property, that is their inheritance; it is theirs in reversion. Those who had been called to suffer the loss of all things might well remember that it was but a present and temporary loss—a loss of their banking account, not of their title deeds—it in no way affected their inheritance. If a man's future is well secured, he can with comparative ease bear present disaster. The future as an *inheritance* is suggestively presented to us as our Heavenly Father's home and estate; but instead of indications of the wealth and extent of it, our minds are occupied with the differences between it

and the inheritances of earth. It is unchangeable, holy, permanent. Earthly properties are ever changing their values; sometimes consist of things of a low and degrading character, and are always uncertain; riches have a way of spreading wings. The Pontine dispersion had lost their inheritance in Palestine, but they have in no sense lost their title to their Father's heavenly inheritance.

III. **The keeping until the future is ready.**—"Who by the power of God are guarded through faith." It were but to lift a part of the load to assure the persecuted believers that an inheritance for them was *held in reserve.* What would ensure their preservation through their present struggles; and what could be done for them in the long waiting-time? They were to think of themselves as now being *kept*, being *guarded.* That includes the supply of every present need, if only they can realise that it is their God and Father who is keeping His sons until the time of their entering on their inheritance. His *keeping* is fulness of blessing. But the keeping of God implies the watching and effort of the believer. The keeping is done through, or in connection with, the believer's *faith.* He must keep up his faith if God is to keep him. The term that is used and translated in R.V., "guarding," is a military term. As the heir of a royal house is never allowed to be without a watchful attendant, so for every "heir of salvation" there are God's attendant ministering spirits. We are safe, we may be satisfied, till our day of possession comes round.

IV. **The discipline of the keeping time.**—"Though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold tempta tions;" trials. A most sympathetic and wise reference to the calamities and afflictions which these Christians had to endure. St. Peter would have them thought of as only the school-boy discipline of the heir to an estate, who must be duly prepared for his coming responsibilities and privileges. Moral character can only be moulded through a discipline of severe experiences; and when we have entered on our inheritance, our surprise will be that God has been enabled to accomplish in us such fitness for it through so few earthly trials. Observe the suggestive relation of the many and various trials and the "little while" for which we have to be disciplined by them. There is always this great consolation connected with our earthly trials: they never do stay long. There is no element of permanency in human troubles. They would not be disciplinary if there were. They cannot stay one moment after God's purpose in them is fully wrought. And so we can always truthfully speak of "our light affliction, which is but for a moment." And there is always this consolation: God's discipline now is the guarantee that He is preparing us for something by-and-bye.

V. **The present possession of that future.**—"Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." "Faith is the substance"—the actual, present realisation—"of things hoped for." It is in one sense true that the heir to an estate, while he is only the heir, has nothing; but it is also true that in the feeling that all is coming to him, he has a present possession of everything; and, moreover, he has the use, up to present needs, of all that belongs to the estate. So the believer has all the comfort of knowing heaven is coming, and for the supply of all his present needs he has the full use of all the heavenly things. The attention of these persecuted men is turned away from the loss of their worldly goods, to the untouched, ever abundant supplies of spiritual good, which really are some of their future inheritance come to them *now.* "Poor in this world, rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom."

VI. **The advantage which Christians have over Jews in this present spiritual possession.**—The Jews' advantages were all in the material, earthly sphere. A *land* of Canaan; a formal and ceremonial religion; an obedience of works. According to their ideas, a Messiah as an earthly conqueror and King. So outward was the entire Jewish range, that the more devout souls, the prophets,

anxiously looked forward to the spiritual time, which the Christians had now entered upon (vers. 10-12). So far from Christian Jews wanting to go back to formal Judaism, the best Jews of the ages had always wanted to get on to Christianity; and even the angels were profoundly interested in this spiritual dispensation. There is nothing to envy in the past. It has had its day; it fitted to the needs of its day. But it only fitted to the average needs of men. In the old times the better, the more spiritual, men could not rest in it, could not be satisfied with it. Abraham "rejoiced to see Christ's day." And so did every man of faith, every man of spiritual insight and spiritual feeling, all down through the ages. If they anticipated the spiritual dispensation, how foolish those actually in the spiritual dispensation must be if they hankered after, and thought of returning upon, the old and formal and preparatory one.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 3. *Hope as a Power in Moulding Character.*—Three great graces—faith, hope, and love—are the abiding graces, vital in their influence on character, and central in their relations to Christianity; combining, they produce all the "fruits of the Spirit." Faith, taking hold on the unseen, prevents us from giving too much heed to that which is visible; Hope, taking hold on the future, prevents us from giving undue attention to that which is temporal and present; Love, taking hold on the unselfish and the Divine, prevents us from being absorbed in carnal and idolatrous self-interest. In the original the emphasis grammatically falls on the word *hope*, for while the other words are participles, this is in the imperative. Literally translated, it would read thus: "Wherefore, girding up the loins of your mind, being sober, hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." The text suggests the power of hope as an inspiration in character and conduct, and indicates the objects of Christian hope, and the time when those objects shall be most gloriously and fully revealed.

I. **Look at the power of hope in human character.**—What makes the difference between human beings and beasts? Very largely, the presence of hope as a factor in character. Hope is one of the foremost elements in human character; distinguishing man as man, giving him a higher rank than all the rest of the animal creation. And as it is a necessary factor in character, so it is in *human progress.* Any conditions in human society which tend to repress or suppress hope are abnormal and unnatural, and hostile to man's well-being. We glory in our American civilisation because, more than in any other country on the face of the earth, men may here *rise*, give scope to hope, foster aspirations, and encourage all rational expectations. Hope presents a perpetual incentive to progress; not an *ignis fatuus*, a will-o'-the-wisp, beguiling us into marsh and mire, but impelling us continually onward to things higher and better. If we could reach our own ideal, further progress would be impossible. And hope helps us to bear trials. It surrounds us with a kind of "elastic medium," so that when the terrible afflictions of this life beat against us, they rebound from us. There is a power in hope that prevents the severity of their blows from crushing us.

II. **What are the objects set before the Christian hope?**—"*The grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" Few of us ever think of this. When we speak of the grace that is revealed, we think of what is already manifested, of Golgotha with its cross, of Gethsemane with its agony, of the Garden with its rent tomb, of the ascending Christ and the descending Spirit. But in the third verse of this chapter the apostle says God "hath begotten us again unto a

lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, *reserved in heaven* for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, *ready to be revealed in the last time.*" Peter is speaking of something *future*, not grace already manifested, but an inheritance "reserved in heaven," "ready to be revealed in the last time." And so here, "The grace that *is to be brought unto you at the revelation* of Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ's incarnation was not a revelation. His Divinity was rather hidden within the veil of His humanity: only now and then the glory of that Divinity shone forth, and then His disciples saw that He was the Son of God, and realised for a moment the greatness and the grandeur of His personality. When Jesus was here He was in disguise. God was only feebly and faintly manifested in the flesh, which obscured the glory. But when Christ comes a second time, no longer to make a sin-offering, but to bring full salvation unto His people, then will be the *revelation* of Jesus Christ. He will come like the King in His glory, and with Him all the holy angels and saints; not to pursue a weary way from the manger to the cross, but as a King to reveal and unfold Himself; and that will be the revelation of Christ. All the grace that comes to you, from the hour of your regeneration to the hour of your complete sanctification, is nothing in comparison with the grace that is *to be* revealed to you by Christ in the day when you are presented, faultless, before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. When Christ shall come to receive His saints to Himself there will be a revelation of grace in comparison with which all the grace that you now have, or have previously known, will be but as a drop in comparison to the ocean.

III. **The contrast between the objects of Christian hope and worldly hope.**—What God promises stands firm—a verity, a reality; there is an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading. You do not see that inheritance yet. You are like a minor who has not yet entered on his estate, but who receives the revenue of it as the payments of interest come in: and so we have a foretaste of our future inheritance; the Spirit of God gives us an earnest of our possession until the day of redemption. There is nothing illusive in the Divine promise. And consider, once more, the permanence and reliability of the Christian objects of desire and expectation. We come to a limit in this world. You may have all the treasure of the world, and yet when death comes, from your relaxing grasp all these things disappear. You may have been applauded and admired by the world, but the applause of men will fade and faint on your ear as you reach the gates of the tomb. The glory of your possessions and your achievements will all pale and grow dim when you face the last great destroyer. But, blessed be God, the point at which human hopes are utterly blasted is the point at which Christian expectations only arrive at their consummation.—*A. T. Pierson, D.D.*

The Resurrection the Chief Doctrine of Christian Faith.—If Christ had not risen from the dead there would be no Christianity; our faith would be in vain, and our hope void, the whole gospel a farce, and there would be no forgiveness of sin. The resurrection of Christ is the basis of all that we have and hope and love in Christ, but especially have we in it the surety of the hope of eternal life, because thereby all fear of death has been banished, and future blessedness and life have become a reality in Christ Jesus. He is our Head, and we through faith are members of His body. And since our Head has overcome sin and death and Satan, we partake of the triumph and the victory. For He has conquered our enemies for us and not for Himself. The victory is ours, as is also the triumph. When a ruler or a general

conquers the enemies of a kingdom, he indeed triumphs, but the fruits and glories of the victory belong to the whole country and to all the citizens. Therefore all Christians triumph with Christ in His glorious resurrection.—*Gossner's Schatz-Kästlein.*

The Resurrection Mystically Treated.—St. Peter is speaking, so far as himself is concerned, not mystically but literally, as his history before and after the resurrection shows. To him and to the other apostles the resurrection *was* a regeneration, and they became new beings. To subsequent Christians precisely the same effect takes place when (suddenly or gradually) the fact of the resurrection is acknowledged and its significance realised (Phil. iii. 10). Yet we must not confine the meaning of the words to the effects of this conscious realisation. St. Peter is reviewing the transaction theologically—*i.e.*, from God's point of view, not phenomenally, from man's. He speaks of the begetting, not of the being born—of the resurrection itself, not of the preaching of the resurrection. To God, with whom, according to St. Peter, time does not exist (2 Pet. iii. 8), there is no interval between His begetting of Christ again from the dead (Acts xiii. 33; Rev. i. 5) and His begetting of us again thereby. In the mystery of our union with the Incarnate Word, historical resurrection *did*, through baptism, in some ineffable manner, infuse into us the grace which makes new creatures of us. Archbishop Leighton well says, "Not only is it" [the resurrection] "the exemplar, but the efficient cause of our new birth."—*A. J. Mason, M.A.*

The Resurrection.

I. **In these words our attention is directed to Jesus Christ.**—"Jesus Christ" is a name above all other names on earth. Many great names of heroes, military conquerors, philosophers, poets, scholars, artists, musical composers, scientific investigators, and discoverers, and great religious reformers, are dear to the heart of this country, and of the whole civilised world. But the name of Jesus is above all other names. Every Sabbath is the weekly memorial of His triumphant resurrection.

II. **Jesus Christ is considered in His human nature.**—"Seed of David." See Matthew's Genealogy. He was also Son of God. "Thou art My Son." "In the beginning was the Word." As God, He could make an atonement for human sins. Yet He was human; a real man, with all our liabilities and limitations, experiencing our infirmities, and having a fellow-feeling with us.

III. **The emphasis given to our Lord's resurrection.**—"Remember." The resurrection is more than a fact. Many facts are secret or private. But the resurrection of Jesus was a public, and thus a historical fact.

IV. **The entire Christian Church—east and west, north and south, is founded on the fact.**—Every individual church, of every name and denomination, is founded on the fact. The church in Antioch, the apostolic churches in Europe, and all other churches, are built up on the same foundation. The observance of the Lord's day bears testimony to the fact of His resurrection.

V. **The disciples of our Lord proclaimed far and wide the fact of the Lord's resurrection.**—They had seen the Lord, and they went into details. They preached everywhere, Christ the Crucified, and Christ the Risen. For their testimony they braved opposition, odium, and obloquy. Jesus also foretold His resurrection. Consider three theories. 1. *Some person or persons had taken His body and hidden it.* They could have had no motive for such theft. 2. *His enemies took it and hid it,* It was in their interest, as His enemies, to produce His body after the third day. 3. *The disciples themselves stole the body and hid it.* How could they dare martyrdom for a fable?

VI. **The Resurrection is a joyful fact.**—"According to My gospel." It

was part of the "glad tidings of great joy" which it was His pride and delight to proclaim. The apostle appropriated it with rapture. "My" gospel. "Remember." We are apt, in the daily jostle of daily business and engagements, to push aside and to forget this fact. Hence the importance of the anniversary of Easter Day, and of every successive Sabbath Day.—*James Morison, D.D.*

Ver. 3-9. *The Living Hope of the Christian.*

I. **What gives us this hope?** (ver 3).—It is God who does this, according to His great mercy. Without this love of God there is fear of Him, and a lack of trust in Him on the part of man, and an endeavour to base and build upon other foundations. Yet all of these prove to be dead hopes, and end in self-deception, or even despair. The living God, through the resurrection of His Son, has given a firm foundation for a living hope; the resurrection being the sure evidence that Christ's atonement for our sins has been accepted, and that in Him and Him alone we can hope.

II. **Who can entertain this hope?** (ver. 5).—It is those who are guarded through faith unto salvation. The only assurance and certainty in this living hope springs from the faith in God's mercy, and Christ's life and work. And reasons to believe we have now, as many as had the early Christians. To them, indeed, the Lord appeared visibly, even to Paul; but we have His sure Word and testimony, and the Holy Spirit working through that Word, convincing and convicting the heart.

III. **What does this hope bring?** (ver. 4).—It is an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled which this living hope guarantees. All this, however, is only possible under the presupposition that those who are to receive this realisation of their hopes are also alive, and have been raised from the tomb. Christ's resurrection is thus to us also a sure sign that we too shall rise and live in and with Him eternally. —*Wilhelm Bauer.*

Vers. 4, 5. *The Inheritance.*—Most of the salutations in the epistles refer to the privileges of believers. We often dwell on the things which we do not possess, but in these introductions we are reminded of the things which we do possess. Our names are down in the old register—the election book. See ver. 2. We trace back our lineage. Every step of the inquiry delights us, as we move from one number of the pedigree to another—martyr, apostle, prophet, priest, king, to the father of the faithful, yea, to Enoch, Enos, and Abel. But the last step is the grandest—to see our name in the old book of election by grace. The new birth,—see ver. 3. We have a new heart of love and tenderness. We are bidden to look forward to the inheritance of the saints in light.

I. **That by the promise of the gospel we are entitled to an inheritance.**—Begotten again, we are children, and as such, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. The words which the apostle uses in the text appear synonymous, and yet they are not. (See the original.)

1. *Immortal in its nature.*—"Incorruptible." The final state of godliness will be of such a spiritual nature that corruption will be impossible. In other words, it will be a state without sin, and, consequently, without its destructive effects. Present experience has its moments of foretaste of that state. Let us examine this matter. Returning on Wednesday evening from Box Hill, the heavens were generally covered with clouds, but in the west the setting sun had riven the clouds, and there was a streak of beautiful blue sky. So is Christian experience—clouds generally, but here and there beautiful light. I will look towards the heaven of your soul. Before the cross and the end of the ninth hour, the light returned. So when conviction made way for con-

version; on the mount of transfiguration, overshadowed by the cloud of glory. So communion with God. "The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." Look to vers. 18, 19, and 23, of this chapter. The life of Jesus is immortal — invulnerable. Strike the light, but you cannot wound it: so is the truth. Touches of these speak of the state when all shall be undying—thought, praise, purity, joy, etc.—all undying. 2. *Pure in its administration.* — "Undefiled." It will be a state the enjoyment of which will preclude the possibility of abuse. The most perfect and delicate flower is the most susceptible of being tarnished or destroyed; the touch of the finger will do this. So with the Christian virtues. When we would do good, evil is present. There are interruptions. Let us name one or two. Interruption to continuous religious thought. The astronomer making observations, and the cloud coming between. Some gloomy thought. There are also circumstances outside ourselves that do this. Like the withering blast of the east wind, our prospects are often blighted. But the state of heaven will be such that no clouds will darken the mind, and no trials will harass the heart. The touch will be pure—even if we touch the throne itself there will be no dark mark. 3. *Perpetual in its beauty.* "That fadeth not away." The beauty that was, has faded; the beauty that is, is fading; and the beauty that is to come must fade here — Nature's beauty, human beauty, and fortune itself. *Moral beauty.* The fair and promising young man has gone wrong. Look at yonder garden. Body like unto His glorious body. The soul without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. Virtue eternal as its Author. 4. *Distant in its location.*—"Reserved in heaven." You must remove to a new scene, where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest. No battle-fields there; no hospitals; no grave-yards. No, not even a trace of sin. "*Reserved.*" Some lovely spot. "Behold, I go and prepare a place for you," —crowns, thrones, etc.

II. **That believers are now kept under guard and discipline in order to the future enjoyment of that blessed state.**—1. *Faith is the medium of power.* —The power of resistance, and the power of perseverance. To reign with Christ in life is full of inspiration. We lay hold of eternal life. 2. *Salvation is the end of faith.* What is the voice of faith but a cry for a better state? We cannot rest till we reach the goal. We press forward. 3. *Time is the revealer of salvation.* You will see. The ages have rolled on—wonderful things. Time's last effort. Bring in the inheritance. What is our title?—*Anon.*

Ver. 5. *Kept by the Power of God.*— Believers, as a class, are thus described: "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." The words bring before us the doctrine commonly known as that of "final perseverance," as opposed to that of possible defection and perdition on the part of true believers and regenerated sinners. Look at the objections to this doctrine, as they seem to weigh upon the minds, not of speculative theologians, but of practical experimental Christians, whose belief is, in purpose and profession, founded on the word of God and the experience of His people. The objections are twofold: (1) The doctrine is unscriptural; (2) it is of evil tendency. These are virtually one; for the objection to the doctrine as unscriptural has no substantive existence or foundation apart from its imputed or alleged pernicious tendencies in practice. It must be admitted that in Scripture there is no categorical denial of this doctrine, or any statement absolutely inconsistent with it. If it is rejected it must be because it is believed to be pernicious. What, then, is the evil tendency imputed to this doctrine? 1. It is said to assume the final perseverance of the saints to be secured by a power inherent in themselves, or by something in the very nature of a

saving change, precluding all defection as a sheer impossibility, entirely irrespective of the subject's own religious state or dispositions, or of any influence exterior to him, over and above the impulse given at conversion, or the *vis inertiæ* of his new-born nature—a belief which may be justly charged with tending to indulge a proud reliance upon self, and an habitual security, alike dishonouring to God and dangerous to man. 2. The only proof which it requires of the saving clause, from which it draws its proud security and absolute immunity from danger, is the consciousness or memory of inward exercises, not susceptible of formal proof, and wholly independent of the actual condition of the subject at the time when he asserts his claim to this prerogative or privilege of absolute exemption from the risk or possibility of a fall from grace. The rejection of the doctrine is always based on the assumption of an inherent independent power of self-preservation, or the sufficiency of mere subjective states and exercises, to demonstrate the possession of that power. But no such assumptions are imputed in the word of God. As in our text, the preservation is explicitly described as the effect of a power exterior and superior to themselves, as effected by a sovereign, a Divine, an almighty agency. If all depend upon the action of Omnipotence (the power of God), where is the pernicious tendency? If we can no more, in and of ourselves, secure our own continuance in this state than we could create it, or create ourselves, or than we could create a world, "where is boasting then? It is excluded." It may, however, be said that if we look upon the exercise of the power of God as absolutely and irrevocably pledged for our protection, the tendency of this belief to generate security and licence is as evident and strong as if the power were inherent in ourselves; nay, more so, since the power, instead of being finite, is now infinite; instead of being human, is Divine; instead of being ours is God's, and yet completely under our control. This specious representation quietly assumes that we ascribe the perseverance of believers to an absolute, immediate act of power, without the use of means or the prescription of conditions. But this aspersion on the doctrine is wiped off by the simple but authoritative language of the text, which, so far from representing this conservative agency of God's grace and omnipotence as acting independently of faith in the preserved and persevering subject, holds up faith itself as in a certain sense the means by which the perseverance is secured, by which the preservation is effected. Faith is not a thing to be assumed at pleasure, but to be established as conclusive evidence; not that of consciousness, or memory, or fancy, but of actual experience and practice. Where the fruits of faith are not, there is no evidence of faith. Where faith is not, there is no pledge of God's omnipotence to save from falling. It is only those who have this faith and bear this fruit that have a right to claim a place among the happy souls who are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."—*J. A. Alexander, D.D.*

Kept unto Salvation.—Many of God's people are at times full of fears concerning their personal interest in Christ. Perhaps it ought not to be so. We have to face the fact that it often is so. The work of sanctification is a quiet, gradual, unseen work, of which we cannot accurately trace all the stages. It may be likened to the currents that run below the surface of the ocean, and secretly bear the vessel on its way, or out of its way. Or it may be likened to the steady march of time, which changes all earthly things, wears away the framework of the Pyramids, and crumbles down the everlasting hills, though, watch as we may, we can hardly follow the process. In our times of fear, we more often doubt our right to the Divine promises than doubt the general fulfilment of the promises. At our darkest times we are assured that the promises are "yea

and amen" for those to whom they are given. Our difficulty is that they are not given *to us*. Sometimes these feelings follow on the encouragement of some loved sin. Keep that sin; call it by some milder name though you may, it will stand between you and God. Like the host of Israel that went forth against the city of Ai, you will return from your toil defeated and disgraced if some accursed thing be kept within your camp. Sometimes they follow on neglected means of grace. Only as the soul maintains a constant intercourse with God can it maintain a constant assurance of His love. Sometimes they follow on watching too minutely our own thoughts, and frames, and feelings. We may soon come to put our trust in those feelings, and then every change in our feeling will fling a shadow over us, and feeble feeling will fill us with despair. In our text may be found a threefold description of the true child of God, by the help of which we may scatter the doubts and fears that loom over us. He is one (1) on whom the preserving power of God rests; (2) one in whom the spirit of faith is working; (3) one for whom salvation is prepared.

I. **The child of God is one on whom the preserving power of God rests.**—This is a description which links the believer with the king-psalmist of Israel, whose poetically recorded experiences we so greatly enjoy. Perhaps there was no thought brought so much peace to the psalmist as the thought that he was "kept by God." To his thought, God was "a sun and a shield; the Lord would give grace and glory." His prayer was, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe." God was to him "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land": "the Keeper of Israel, who never slumbered nor slept." He could say of God, "I flee unto Thee to hide me." Christian experience ever deepens our conviction of our own weakness; our inability to protect and keep ourselves. We feel more and more every day that we need a guarding as well as a guiding hand. The promises Christ gave to His disciples show that this need was recognised. "They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." Those disciples are the sheep and lambs of Christ's flock. They may be quite sure that the Shepherd is ever near to protect, defend, and keep. Our Lord, in His great intercessory prayer, said, "I kept them in Thy name, and none of them is lost." Discipleship to Christ involves Divine keeping; and the Saviour prayed as though He were bound to give an account to God of each believer's safety. We may realise this preserving power of God in several ways. 1. *In the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit.* No doubt the operations of the Spirit are mysterious. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth." But He does take up His abode in the believing soul. His presence pledges the fact of the change wrought in us. His operation is designed to preserve the soul from all evil, and to guide it into all truth. Source whence all Divine blessings for the soul flow, whence all the food of the spiritual life comes, whence all developments of the spiritual life receive their furtherance, that Spirit is no less the "Great Heart" guide, by whom the pilgrim is defended and preserved, the champion by whom his foes are defeated and his difficulties overcome. His presence is our seal unto the day of redemption; His work to keep the soul unto the full salvation that is prepared. The presence of the Holy Spirit is the fulfilment of all the promises of the Divine Presence. When Moses stood before the burning bush, and received the Divine command for the deliverance of Israel, he was overwhelmed by the responsibilities of the charge, and received this comforting and strengthening assurance: "Certainly I will be with thee." That promise was fulfilled in the presence with him of God's Holy Spirit. When Jeremiah

pleaded his incapacity for the prophetic office, so earnestly saying, "Ah, Lord God; behold, I cannot speak! for I am a child," God's promise came, comforting him: "Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee." That also was fulfilled in the presence of God the Spirit. And how much to us all is that promise and assurance of our ascending Saviour, "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the world." However else we may think that promise to have been fulfilled, it was certainly fulfilled in the abiding presence with us of the Holy Spirit. We imagine a sort of threefold Divine presence that we enjoy. A presence of God the Father—a Divine eye watching our every step, searching our every thought and purpose; a presence of God the Son, the living Friend to whom our thoughts may be made known, whose companionship we may daily enjoy; and a presence of God the Spirit, working within us, checking, inspiring, guiding, keeping. But, if we think a little closely, shall we not find that these three are one? If we have the presence of the Spirit, have we not each person of the blessed Trinity—the loving Father, the only-begotten Son, and the all-presiding Spirit. Surely the whole promise of a present God is fulfilled for you, if you know that the Spirit of God is with you. If you know His power in your heart, rejoice; it is the power of God, a power efficient to keep you unto the salvation ready to be revealed. 2. *In the strength we derive from the exercise of prayer.* The spirit of prayer is illustrated in the wrestling of Jacob with the angel at the Brook Jabbok. Intense earnestness is expressed in that determination, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Prayer is a laying hold of the Divine arm, a reliance on the Divine strength. The very terms of Christian prayer indicate our sense of God's interest in us, and concern for us. "Abba, Father," gathers about us fatherly love, fatherly watchfulness, and fatherly preservations. Thankfulness in prayer is the recognition of the hand of goodness ever over us. And the substance of all prayer is, that in all the forms of our spiritual toil and struggle we may have the help of God; we may not be left to our own weakness; we may be upheld and kept. And so of all the answers we receive to our prayer. They may be summed up in one thing: the realisation of God's presence with us, and power resting on us. The sense of Divine aid, Divine inspiration, Divine keeping, which we may bear about with us day by day, is the answer to our prayer. 3. *In the actual experience of the believer.* In their temple service the Jewish people might well sing, "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge," because their entire history was lit up with continual signs of His presence and power. Delivered from the house of bondage with a high hand, the sea saw the majesty of their leader, and fled, leaving a highway for God's people; waste deserts became lands of plenty, and foes failed when Israel's God marched before them. Manifested in burning bush and fiery pillar, ruling as Theocratic King, raising up one and setting down another, delivering and redeeming again and again, no truth was brought home to the Jew like this one, "The Lord of hosts is with us." And we are the Israel of God. The power of God is witnessed in all our past history. Looking at the way in which the Lord hath led us, we say, again and again, There God guided; there God preserved; there God conquered for us; there foes gathered thickly, but God put His hedge of mercy round us; there we made mistakes, and wandered into by-paths that might have led us to destruction, but God in mercy restored our wandering feet. Over all our past may well be written, "Kept by the power of God." We have been like that servant of the prophet. We could see that the house was surrounded with foes, and there was no way of escape. We could not see what,

nevertheless, we might have seen, that the mountains all round about were full of the chariots and horsemen of the Lord. Far "greater were those with us than all that could be against us."

II. **One in whom the spirit of faith is working.**—Faith is often dealt with as connected with our first approach to God; as the gate at the head of the way of life. But we need to see that this same "faith" is called for throughout the whole course of the Christian life. We live day by day, spiritually, only as we believe; our strength, our comfort, our success, are in direct proportions to our faith. The work being carried on in your hearts is a spiritual work; you cannot watch it with your bodily eyes. The Being working is a spiritual Being; you can never see Him by your side. His way of working is a spiritual way; you may not always discover it: only faith brings the comfort of the Divine strength and nearness. That is true for us which was but fabled of an ancient prince. He had lost his father, and when setting out to endeavour to gain tidings of him, one of the divinities came down, took the form of an aged counsellor, and accompanied him in all his journeyings. That is true for us, but we only feel it, only get the joy of it, only know the impulses of it, only walk strongly and safely, as faith realises the fact. There is a great difference between knowing things with the mind, and believing them with the heart. The doctrines, commands, and promises of God lie within this sacred book like dry bones in the valley. They are mere forms of truth; mere declarations of Divine wisdom; beautiful enough, but cold and dead. Faith comes, the faith which says, This is the Word of God, and the Word of God to me—and then the dry bones live; a creative breath seems to have passed over them all. Without faith the Word of God is as a harp fully strung, but silent. Even in its silence one feels there are within it the possibilities of beauteous song. But let faith come, and touch the chords; then music is drawn forth, which seems like earth-echoes of the angels' songs above. Now it may be warlike tones, wild and clear, that nerve the Christian's arm, and send him boldly forth to fight the good fight of faith; now gentle, soothing strains that calm the troubled breast, and whisper to the torn and tried, God's eternal peace. Have faith in God. Lay hold thereby of the power of God. Let that be the spirit in you which grasps the Divine energy that would rest upon you. With the power on you, and the faith in you, you shall be kept unto the salvation prepared. Learn from that great chapter of Hebrews how faith can work in daily life. Faith marked the acceptable worship Abel offered. Faith gave the triumph in the hour of Enoch's translation. Faith kept Noah when the judgments of God were in the earth. Faith guided Abraham in his journeyings. Faith saved Moses in the moments of danger. Faith discomfited the foes of God's Israel. And what shall we more say? Time would fail to tell the triumphs of daily faith, the toil it helps us to perform; the sorrow it helps us to bear; the wisdom it helps us to gain; the evils it helps us to fight; the glory it helps us to win.

III. **One for whom salvation is prepared.**—Our salvation begins when we begin to live for God. Peter speaks of "receiving now the end of your faith, even the salvation of your soul." But that salvation has another stage. It is really as yet undeveloped. "Now are we the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be." The salvation now is salvation in the world, that shall be salvation from the world. This is salvation going on amid dangers, temptations, and evils: that shall be salvation perfected in scenes of holy rest, and triumph, and peace. And that fuller salvation is ready, prepared, waiting to be revealed. This further salvation is God's purpose in the work of His Son. However much the work of Christ accomplishes for us here on

earth; however God's grace beautifies character, conquers evil, gladdens the home, gilds life with brightness, and crowds it with blessing, we cannot limit the great salvation to that which is earthly and fleeting. The purpose of God in redemption is wide and broad and deep as the everlasting life, and long as the everlasting ages. It may find you a poor sinful soul, low down in degradation; it will cleanse all stains, heal all wounds, and bless you now; but it will not rest satisfied until you are placed as a polished jewel in the crown of the Redeeming King. This is the design of the preserving power that rests upon you. For what does He keep you? Why does an eye that never slumbers nor sleeps watch Israel? Why does the Almighty Friend ever abide with us? Why? It is this: that we are being "kept" to the salvation that is ready to be revealed. This is the end of our faith. Faith grasps much for this life; but it is like the foreign bird, brought from sunnier climes—it ever seems to be stretching its wings and striking the bars of its cage, as though it would be away to the home it loves. Faith, a heavenly thing, born of God, in sympathy with the high and heavenly, will press beyond the struggling and darkness of time, and strive to gain the light and peace of eternity. And all is to be revealed in the last time. We know when that is. When the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they be few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened; when the silver cord shall be loosed, and the golden bowl be broken; when the dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit return unto God who gave it;—then shall the full salvation be revealed, and we shall enter the New Jerusalem, from whence they go out no more, and where God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes. Kept now for sanctifying, one day we shall be glorified.

Ver. 6. *Rejoicing and Heaviness.*—This verse seems to gather up the thought of the first nine verses. The tone of this epistle reveals the sanctifying influence of a Christian experience upon St. Peter. What strikes attention is the recognition of the twofoldness of religious life. If it breathes the air of heaven, it treads the soil of earth. We are often surprised to find the life is a constant struggle, and the soul is calm with a Divine peace. St. Peter intimates that this is the very thing we should expect. The best men cannot always live in the sunshine of hope. A Christian life on earth can hardly fail to be a mingling of rejoicing and heaviness.

I. **The spirit of the Christian should usually be a spirit of rejoicing.**—1. The rejoicing of *love* (ver. 8). Love to Christ. The love that comes with faith in the unseen. Accepted love is our deepest source of earthly joy. We feel a holy pride when we can say of the Lord Jesus, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend." 2. The rejoicing of the promised future (ver. 4). But the future finds nothing for the soul apart from Christ. Heaven is everything *if* the "Lamb be the light thereof."

II. **The spirit of the Christian may be for a time a spirit of heaviness.**—The rejoicing is "without limit." The sadness is "for a season," and "if needs be." The heaviness comes from the trying, testing, of the very faith whence the rejoicing comes. The struggle of life may be expressed in this form: Under how thick darkness can you cling to Christ? Beaten however severely by foes, can you still keep hold on Christ, refusing to be beaten off! Whatever your earth-trials may be, remember they are but passing things. The soul's restful joy in God should be deep, abiding, eternal.

Note by Archbishop Leighton.—"His scope is to stir up and strengthen spiritual joy in his afflicted brethren. In this thing ye rejoice, that ye are begotten again; that there is such an inheritance, and that you are made heirs of it; that it is kept for you, and

you for it; that nothing can come betwixt you and it, and disappoint you of possessing and enjoying it. Though there be many deserts and mountains and seas in the way, yet you are ascertained that you shall come safely thither."

The Christian State.—1. The Christian state is properly one of deep and abiding joy. See this in St. Paul. (1) Joy in the salvation wrought by God. (2) Joy in the salvation resting on God. A deep-sea calm. An above-clouds calm. 2. Apparently, the Christian state is one of agitation, anxiety, and heaviness. Observe, however, the qualifications of this—"for a season," "if needs be." Still, even with these qualifications, the Christian state is often one of heaviness. How is this? The soul's joy is the sign of a life of faith, and this must be *tested*, as in the case of Abraham, David, Peter. Can anything keep up the soul's joy under the heaviness. (1) Assurance that it is *testing*, not destruction, not punishment. (2) Assurance that God is watching the process, regarding it as a precious work of refining. (3) Seeing that the designed issue is a simpler hold of Christ; a clearer spiritual sight of Him. And so, through the experience, the joy really becomes "unspeakable and full of glory." And so we receive *now* the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls (*a*) from fear, (*b*) from sin, (*c*) from corruption. And thus we are made ready for Christ's appearing. We see what we ought to regard as our great Christian treasure —our souls' joy in the great salvation. We are sure to have the joy if only we have, and can keep, holy admirations of Christ.

The Future in the Present.—St. Peter here states a fact of common human experience, which takes its highest form in the Christian spheres. The future we anticipate does exert a present influence on us. What *is to be* is everywhere helping men to bear what *is*. The "castles in the air" of the boy or girl at school help them over present tasks and discipline. The future of business success strengthens men to bear with and to overcome present perplexities and difficulties. The "good time coming," the "golden age," are not altogether things in the by-and-bye. They are actually with us now, in the cheer and strength they give.

Ver. 8. *Things Unseen.*—It takes a very strenuous effort to bring the unseen Christ before the mind habitually, and so as to produce effects in the life. You have to shut out a great deal besides, in order to do that; as a man will shade his eyes with his hand in order to see some distant thing the more clearly. Keep out the cross lights, that you may look forward. You cannot see the stars when you are walking down a town street and the gas lamps are lit. All those violet depths, and calm abysses, and blazing worlds, are concealed from you by the glare at your side. So, if you want to see into the depths and the heights, to see the great white throne and the Christ on it, who helps you to fight, you have to go out unto Him beyond the camp, and leave all its dazzling lights behind you.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

The Love of One Unseen.—In Peter we have not a highly intellectual, cultured man, so it was not given to him to set the first forms and shapes to the expression of Christian doctrine. For that work the Apostle Paul was specially called, endowed, and educated, and the fitness of the Divine choice of instruments has never been more fully demonstrated than in the selection of Paul for that particular work. Peter evidently had a larger heart than head; his great feature was impulsiveness: sometimes it led him astray into forwardness, presumption, and over-positiveness; but sometimes it enabled him to make noble testimonies, and even sometimes to force an entrance into mysteries whose doors refused to

yield at the bidding of sanctified intellect. It may be said, in a comprehensive way, that we are indebted to Paul for Christian truths that may be thought out. Paul, in his most enthusiastic moments, is a man of mind and culture, and he abundantly proves that the intellectual man need not be a cold, hard, dry, or unloving man. Again and again we find his soul catching fire of the truth with which he deals, all aglow with the fervour and enthusiasm which the truth he studies enkindles; bursting out in intense utterances of adoration, as if the emotions of his heart must force the bonds of silence, and send forth at least a cry. Peter adds to the circle of Christian truth and doctrine almost wholly those forms which bring satisfaction to the *heart*, which are found out by the sensitiveness of Christian emotion; and so his words come to us like fresh revelations in particular moods of our feeling. In our times of meditation, of quickened emotion, of sacramental preparation, we shall find words of Peter frequently suggested, and largely helpful; by their aid our souls may often gain wing, and fly into the innermost recesses of communion with Christ, and with His truth. Peter's words have often proved, through the Divine Spirit, live coals from off the altar, which have re-illumined the smouldering love of our souls, and set the flame rising high again, and burning bright for consuming the dross of self and sin. Our text is one of his most characteristic and best-remembered words. I envy no man who is so unsusceptible to its tenderness, its thrill of emotion, and its hallowed suggestiveness, that he can coldly study it, take it to pieces, criticise it, and set out the precise meaning of its parts. I cannot. I shall not try to. I shall not satisfy anybody to-day who asks exactly what it means, what it teaches and what it involves. I have wanted it to be to me a live coal, setting fire to holy feelings of love and truth within me. And now I want it to be a live coal to you, kindling such fires of thankfulness, faith, and love in you, that we may have an unusual time of refreshing and hallowed joy in presence of the emblems of our suffering, dying Saviour to-day. I want to lead you along this line of thought, staying a little while at each point for the needful unfolding and illustration. Salvation comes by love to a Person; that love may be sight-quickened, that love may be faith-quickened; the love quickened by faith will be altogether nobler, mightier, more satisfying than the love quickened by sight.

I. Salvation comes by love to a Person.—I am always trying to make you see what a large, comprehensive thing our salvation is. With its varied forms of beginning, with its many-sided applications as it continues its working, and with its many endings of relation to soul-life, body-life, and social life, the salvation of a man may well be called "so great salvation." Looking in some directions towards God and conditions of reconciliation and acceptance with Him; in others, towards ourselves and the effectual removal of the very love of sinning; and in yet others, towards our fellow-men, and perfecting the harmony of our intercourse with them;—verily a man's salvation does grow to our thought as a very wide, rich, comprehensive thing. I cannot get all the fulness of the idea of a man's salvation into the word *conversion;* that is but a point of it, a stage in it, a portion of it. Nor will it all go into the word *sanctification;* that, too, expresses a part only. The Bible words are *regeneration* and *salvation*—wide words, that arch over a man's life, from the moment of spiritual awakening right through to the moment of "presenting faultless before the glory," even as the arched dome of heaven spans our earth from utmost east to utmost west. Can we get any worthier impression of what God intends, and what he prophetically sees realised, when he *begins* to save a man? Surely He anticipates the poor half-burnt

brand, not only plucked from the fire, but the fire-marks taken away; the brand quickened with new life, grafted into the true vine, filled in every duct and vessel with the rich vine sap, and bringing forth abundant fruit. The brand is not fully saved until the grape clusters hang thickly upon it. Surely when God touches the heart of the poor, weary, homeless, despised, and despairing prodigal with the thought of love and home, it is in the hope of finding him one day settled in the old son's place, and filled with the old child-spirit of obedience and trust. The prodigal is not saved by being put back into the home, he is only saved when he gets again the spirit of the home. What does God see as the final issue when He begins to save a man? Surely a sight that must fill with rejoicing that heavenly Father's heart. He sees one clothed in white robes, all stainless, which are the emblem of one at last made all pure and "glorious within." He sees one crowned with a crown which is the seal of final victory in the life-battle with sin. He sees one tuning a right noble song from a heaven-harp; a song so sweet, so loud, it shall for ever tell what joys fill that soul with rapture which has reached the perfect righteousness and the full salvation. Let us but get this large idea of what it is for a man to be saved, and then we shall see the truth of the statement that salvation comes by love to a Person. No merely intellectual grasp of any truth, even the sublimest ever revealed to man, can work out this great and mighty change. The force that alters man for better or for worse is the force of His love. "Tell me," it has been said, "the companions a man keeps, or the friends he has, and I will tell you what he is." The great renewing, changing, saving power is our love to the Lord Jesus Christ, the infinitely excellent and loving One; or, as I like to think of it, it is our heart-grasp of Him; because all heart-grasps must be blended faith-holdings and love-holdings; and when faith and love hold together, love is sure to swallow up and absorb the faith: and when our love just opens our whole soul and life to Christ, and bids Him welcome to come right in, then all the saving power He has in His Divine right, and has won by His life, experience, and sacrifice, can be exerted in us; He can save us wholly; save us with His full salvation from the past, from our sins, from sinfulness, from death, from hell; save us by changing us into the likeness of His own obedience, trust, and love; and so prepare us to "shine for ever in the light of God," the monuments of a great salvation. We may *believe a thing*, we cannot *love* a thing: we may like it, admire it, value it, cherish it. It is of necessity to love that its object must be able to respond, returning love for love. So you see I believe in the work of Christ; believe in the Atonement; and the Redemption; and the Sacrifice; and the Resurrection. But since my higher life, my full salvation, comes by that *love*, which is a swallowing-up of faith in something higher, I must get beyond things: I shall never be able to *love* the work, and the Atonement, and the Redemption, —they must pass into lights which shine down upon, and all around, the *Saviour*, the Redeemer, the Atoner, the Propitiator, Him who gave Himself for us—glorifying Him, making Him so beautiful that our heart is wholly won to Him, our love fully set upon Him, and body, soul, and spirit, are yielded in a sacrifice of affection unto Him. Sometimes you feel a little difference between the mode in which I present Divine truth to you, and the modes of your previous apprehension; and possibly you may sometimes think the difference far greater than it is. Really it lies in this: you think so much of the redemption; I try to lift up your eyes, and get them fixed on the *Redeemer*. You dwell on the *work* of salvation; I try to point out the *person* of the Saviour, and show you what glorious power to deliver He has gained through His work. You try to formulate a *doctrine* of the

Atonement; I long to make you see the infinite fitness and fulness of the Divine *Atoner* and Reconciler. You say, "It is Christ that died." I try to repeat after Paul, and say, Yes, that is true, but there is more. Oh! to see and feel that something more: "Yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." It is impossible to do more than suggest to you how much the apostles made of the *person* of Christ, and how constant is their demand of loyal attachment to Him, trust and love to Him. A little roll of passages may suffice to set this upon your thoughts. Christ required personal relations to Himself. "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden." "He that hath the Son hath life." "I give unto them eternal life." "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." "By faith that is in Me." "Whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life." "This do in remembrance of Me." The apostles preach, saying: "Him hath God exalted, a Prince and a Saviour." "God hath made that same Jesus whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." "Unto you that believe He is precious." Paul shows us his loving relations to a personal living Saviour, when he says, "The life I live in the flesh is a life of faith on the Son of God"; and our text is in fullest accord with the whole New Testament when it says, "*whom*," not "which"—"whom having not seen, we love; in whom though now we see Him not yet believing, we rejoice," etc. And surely He is the true minister of the Word who, as an ambassador of the *living Christ*, beseeches men in Christ's stead to be reconciled unto God." This, then, is a most true and worthy way in which to think about Divine things. Our full salvation comes by love to a Person. In presence of these sacramental emblems, how true that must seem to every one of us! Just what we gather round them for is, that, seeing Christ afresh by their help, we may set our love afresh upon Him; and often we have found that nothing so mightily helps us in our godly living as these sacramental quickenings of our love to the personal and living Christ. We do not see Him in a vision of dazzling brightness, "clothed in white garments down to the foot. . . . His head and hairs white like wool, as white as snow, His eyes like flames of fire, His feet like fine brass, burning to white heat in a furnace?" His voice does not come to us like "the sound of many waters"; but we still hear Him say the words which quicken adoring, thankful, trustful love: "Fear not; I am the first and the last, I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore. Amen." The old test of discipleship remains: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" Well for us all, and for the progress of the work of redemption in us, if we can respond, "Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee."

II. **That love may be sight-quickened.**—As was the love of the disciples for their Master. They were with Him in the privileges of closest intimacy; they received the impressions of confidence which ought to follow witnessing His mighty works; but far beyond that, the secrecies of communion, the knowledge of His private life of purity and charity, woke in their hearts an enthusiasm of affection which made them in due time heroes and martyrs. With what a tender, trustful affection *John* loved Christ; getting as close as he could to Him, and even, with almost a woman's gentleness, venturing to lean on His bosom. With what a passionate and ardent affection *Peter* loved Him; a kind of love which might stumble, but was too wholly sincere and intense entirely to fail and fall. Would you see love that comes *by sight*, read the heart of Mary Magdalene, that woman who was "last at the cross and first at the grave," and wept her sorrow because they had taken away the body which she had meant

to embalm with sweetest spices by her own loving hands; or go into the Bethany home, and see Mary pass out, soon to return and blend precious ointment and thankful tears upon the Saviour's feet; look at her:—

"Her eyes are homes of silent prayer,
Nor other thought her mind admits,
But, he was dead, and there he sits,
And He that brought him back is there.

"Then one deep love doth supersede
All other, when her ardent gaze
Roves from the living brother's face,
And rests upon the Life indeed."
Tennyson.

All this was sight-quickened love; they *saw* and believed; and need I point out how this love was salvation to them, delivering them from sin, and self, and all ignoble ends, and lifting them up to all high and noble uses, and putting a glory on their lives? Too readily we cherish the thought of our dreadful loss, in that we have never seen Christ. Sometimes the heart goes out in a passionate longing: "Oh that I could but once see Him!" How would we journey if we might at last gaze upon Him in one of His attitudes of infinite tenderness, bending to look with such gentle acceptance on the poor sinner that rained her tears upon His feet, or holding a little babe in His arm, and touching the other little ones that clung about His robe, and saying, "Suffer the little ones to come unto Me." Only to see a full-length picture of Him sets our heart beating with emotion; surely we could believe, we could love, if we might but see *Him*. So we repeat the mistake of doubting Thomas, who wanted to *see* the wound-marks in His hands and side. And to us, as well as to Him, comes the Saviour's gentle reproof: "Thomas, because thou hast seen Me thou hast believed; blessed are they which have not seen, and yet have believed."

III. **That love may be faith-quickened.**—As was the love of these stranger Jews, scattered abroad, to whom Peter wrote, and as is ours. They, nor we, have ever seen the Son of God; yet, "though now we see Him not, believing in Him, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Archbishop Leighton says: "The eye is the ordinary door by which love enters the soul, but this (saving love to the Lord Christ) enters by the faith-faculty, which is the soul's eye." For the things that are unseen and eternal stand related to the soul's eye just as the things that are seen and temporal do to the bodily eye. And amongst the various definitions given of faith, I would single out this one as peculiarly full, and true, and suggestive: "Faith is that state of the soul in which the things of God become glorious certainties." Must not all the faculties of our *soul* be vastly superior to the faculties of our bodies? In truth they are sublime powers, only feebly represented even by the wonderful senses of eye, and ear, and touch. It is a far, far grander thing that we can love, and believe, and adore, and obey, than that we can see, and hear, and feel. And all that sphere of unseen things with which faith and love and hope have to do is far more *real* than that outward world of sensible objects with which eye and touch can deal. Put together these two things: "The sun shines;" "God lives;" and surely that one which only the soul's eye sees, which only faith can grasp, is the one which is most certainly true, really the most free from doubt to every one whose soul-eye is clear. Only try to think what a little piece of our life, after all, is concerned with "things seen and temporal," and how broad, and wide, and high, and rich, is the world of the unseen with which we deal. The things of thought, emotion, and affection, are mostly unseen. The heroes, whose stories we cherish for continual inspiration, are all unseen. Our departed friends are now unseen; we have only the images of them which faith and love create. Beyond the blue sky we see the dome of God; within the movements of nature we trace the handiwork of God. Measure life by what our eye sees, our ear hears, and our hand can touch, and it is a poor,

limited life indeed; so many miles through to the other side—so many leagues measured all round. Look at life with the soul's eye, see it with the faith-faculty, and then our human life grows profound and awful; worlds are within worlds; worlds are beyond worlds; everything has eternal issues and relations. By the measurements of faith the world's diameter is infinite, and its circumference is God. But the question which our text suggests, and which our Christian hearts want answered, is this: Can this faith-sight of Christ help me to *love*, to the love that saves? Well we know, for again and again we have felt how, looking into the face, and watching the life, of our brother or sister has touched our hearts and won out a love that longed to prove its deep, true power in sacrifices for them. Well we know how sight-quickened love has delivered us from evil, elevated us, made us nobler men and women. But can it be so with *faith-sight*? Yes, brethren, and more, much more. Try if your *loves* are all limited to those you *see*. Try whether it is so, that all the persons present to your heart are persons you can look upon and touch. Well the widow knows that her unseen husband is far closer and more real to her than any who sit beside her. The mother folds her heavenly child to her heart oftener than her living children to her bosom. And by faith we can see Christ; we can realise Him, and find kindlings of love rise towards Him, purer, stronger far than any that we might have felt, had we looked into His human face and touched His gracious hand. How true poetry is to the deepest feelings of our nature! Tennyson, mourning over his friend, lost to touch, tells us how near that friend ever was to thought, and heart, and faith:—

"Dear friend, far off, my lost desire,
So far, so near, in woe and weal;
O loved the most, when most I feel
There is a lower and a higher;

"Far off thou art, but ever nigh,
I have thee still and I rejoice."

"Known and unknown; human, Divine;
Sweet human hand, and lips, and eye;
Dear heavenly friend that canst not die,
Mine, mine, for ever, ever mine."

And hear how the poet-soul thinks of *Him* who found it "expedient that He should go away," out of sight and touch, to become for human souls the *ideal* of all that is pure, and loving, and winsome, and beautiful:—

"Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen Thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace.

"Thou seemest human and Divine,
The highest, holiest manhood Thou."

Better, far better for us, that Christ is now unseen. We are no longer limited to the impressions produced by His human figure, we can raise the noblest and most perfect ideal of Him; we can put about our thought of Christ everything that we find touches our heart most deeply, everything we count most loving and lovely. Even when we love through sight we do not love *exactly what we see*, but an *ideal* which our heart fashions; we love our beloved because we see them transformed with a beauty which our heart gathers round them; and upon the records left of the Son of God we all can build the figure of *our own Christ*, transcendently, infinitely pure and lovely, and our soul will be lifted up by the very nobility and glory of the unseen One whom we love. And this is our confidence and joy; our ideal shall never disappoint us. Let the faith-faculty do its utmost, and the love-faculty crown its creation to the utmost, it cannot reach the very glory of Jesus; it is never worthy of Him. He *is* better than mind can think. He *is* better than heart can conceive. Our Christ is *unseen*, and yet we *set our love upon Him*. Our Christ we shall not see to-day, and yet, believing in Him, we may be found rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls. How can this be? What is there in our soul-vision of Christ to kindle fresh love and awaken a joy that

shall be ever growing toward the unspeakable? What? Oh, brethren, as you see Him there, about Him is the fashion of a "lamb as it had been slain." Gazing on Him, our soul is flooded with memories of a wonderful, blessed past. We see the manger-place that tells how He thought not even equality with God a thing to be held with unrelaxing grasp, but emptied Himself and entered the world a helpless Babe. We see the daily scene of self-denial and grace—mighty deeds of kindness, and winsome words of love, —melting even hard hearts to His obedience. We see the scene shaded by the olives of Gethsemane. We see the scene illumined by the torches of a murderous band. We see the scenes that disgraced for ever the tribunals of earthly judgment. We see a Saviour coming forth, wearing a mock crown of thorns and a scornful old purple cloak, yet calm in the grace of His self-sacrifice. We see three crosses; our soul is entranced to watch the dying agonies and listen to the dying cries of One whose woe a darkening sky in mercy hid; and as we see our hearts remind us that all this was *borne for us.*

"For love of us He bled;
For love of us He died;
'Twas love that bowed His fainting head,
And pierced His sacred side."

Is it any wonder that those memories should quicken within us a new and enthusiastic love? And when the memories of the past grow faint, we look again, and lo! how beautiful our Saviour *is*! In His face shines the glory of an infinite love, that has won its triumph out of sacrifice. Does heaven seem bright? It is the light of His beauty shining through it. Is heaven radiant with song? The one burden of those who sing is the infinite worth and grace of Him who "loved us and gave Himself for us." And as, admiringly, with the eyes of our soul, we look upon Him; as we cherish loving memories, and listen to His words of tenderness and grace, still spoken to all loving hearts;—how can we keep our souls from rising in their responsive love, and saying, with new enthusiasm of affection, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee."

Did St. Peter say, "*Not* having seen"? That is but partly true, poorly true. Our souls *have seen* the unseen Christ. The life is ever freshly manifested to the faith-quickened vision of human souls. We have seen. We have "beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"; and it may be that we shall have another soul-vision to-day, and our hearts may respond, as did Thomas, saying, "My Lord and My God."

Ver. 7. *The Proper Reading of Human Afflictions.*—They are the "trial of our faith." Faith is here put for the Christian profession, which is based on faith in Jesus as Messiah and Saviour. And the trial of the faith is spoken of because those addressed were actually then suffering on account of their Christian profession. The writer of the epistle more fully describes the trial through which these Jewish Christians had passed (Heb. x. 32-34). "After ye were enlightened, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly while ye were made a gazingstock, both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly while ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods." The trial of faith is sometimes spoken of in a way that leaves a very unworthy impression of God upon the mind. It is assumed that He sends trial in an arbitrary way, upon His good pleasure, and as an exercise of what is called Divine Sovereignty. Scripture gives no warrant for our representing Divinely sent trials as other than "for our profit." Man submits metals to severe testings, but only with one or both of two distinct objects in view. Either for the improving of the metal itself, or for the preparing of the metal unto some use and service. And human

afflictions, as God-sent trials of faith, are never read aright, unless they are seen to have a distinct purpose in the improvement of the person subject to them, or in the fitting of him for some particular ministry. "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men."

Ver. 8. *Loving Whom we have Not Seen.*—That God should be invisible is a necessity of His perfection. Heaven is no more capable of containing God than the earth, although more of His glory is displayed there. And angels and sainted souls in heaven, in their highest raptures, in their clearest visions, "see no similitude." But here is another kind of invisibility altogether. God having appeared and made Himself "manifest," disappears again from mortal sight. Jesus Christ, in personal, visible form, has wholly left this world. All the myriads of living men who name His name have to speak of Him as "Him whom they have not seen." This is apt to shape itself to our first thoughts as, in some sense, a loss. "The eye affects the heart," and we think that if we saw Him with our eyes it would surely be a little easier to believe in Him, and our love would spring up at the sight. When we think more deeply, and bring into our view, as far as we can, all the elements of the case, we drop these earthly hankerings and vain regrets, and, coming upon the higher ground of our text, we say, "Whom having not seen, we love." It is very desirable that we should live habitually on this higher ground, making as few backward, downward movements, to the lower ground, as may be. It is a fact that great multitudes *saw* Jesus Christ in the flesh, and did not believe. It is a fact that great multitudes who had thus seen Him in the flesh without believing, *did believe* immediately after He disappeared. It is a fact that those who had believed when He was here, believed still more when He went away. Their faith then became more intelligent and more heroic; it became another and a higher thing. It is a fact that many who had not seen Him, but, being His contemporaries, had often heard of Him, without believing by the hearing, no sooner heard that He had gone from the world than they believed at once. It is a fact that great numbers, in many cities and countries, hearing from the lips of preachers and evangelists the whole story of His coming to this world and going hence, believed. It is a fact that on the same testimony, and by force of the same evidence, men have believed ever since, all over the world, and are believing now. Take for guidance of thoughts three words out of the passage:—

I. **Faith.**—"Yet *believing*, we rejoice." Faith is naturally the first thing, without which no other thing can be. If we do not believe in the existence of Christ in heaven, of course we shall not direct any affections to Him there. If we do believe, we have it as our life-work to nourish faith, to raise it to its higher degrees, keep to it in perpetual exercise. Faith is fundamental, but it is structural as well—it grows in and with the building. If his life is a growing one, as every life should be, his faith grows with and in his life, and his life by his faith. Nearly all believing may be said to be believing in Christ. This makes the object of faith so simple, and yet so manifold! It is Christ in heaven, but that one thing contains many. He is therewith as a sacrifice, to offer its perpetual virtue; as an advocate, to plead for those who are in trouble and danger; as a Ruler, to watch and guide all affairs; as a Friend, to do His friends all kindly service; as an Elder Brother, to prepare for the home-coming of the younger members of the Divine family, and to welcome them home when they come.

II. **Love.**—"Whom having not seen, ye love." The love is really born with the faith, begins to act with it, grows by its means, and is not cooled or repressed by the invisibility of its object. Love is the tenderest and the

most delicate, and yet it is the strongest and most overmastering, of all human emotions. To love Christ—there, in a moment, you have the sublime of this affection! But how does the great and glorious Christ feel to *me*? For love rises to meet love. The feet of love are fleetest when other feet are seen advancing. The arms of love are outstretched to meet outstretched arms.

III. **Joy.**—One Christian feeling thus glides into another, becomes part of another. Faith begins to have a glow in it, and—lo! it is "Love." "Love" begins to have a gladness and to wear a glory, and—lo! it is heavenly "Joy." There is some joy in every Christian's heart. Much will depend on temperament, much on habit, much on outward circumstances, as to the development and cultivation of this sacred principle. But in every case you have the element and actual beginning—the root, and fountain, and flowing spring, of a heavenly and eternal joy. Blessed necessity! that compels every soul in Christ to be happy in Him! A flame of renewal has passed through the inmost being, refreshing waters of grace have cleansed every corrupted faculty, and cooled every fevered thought. If he cannot break out into a loud song, he can chant some softer syllables of praise. It is even said to be the joy "unspeakable"; and it is "full of glory."—*A. Raleigh, D.D.*

The Love of the Unseen.—Show how it is that we find it possible to love the unseen; and that it is possible for our love of the unseen to become a mightier moral power than our love of the seen. Our salvation comes by love (which necessarily includes faith), but in setting our love upon Christ we are under this apparent disability: we have not the important help of the sight-faculty. We are, however, under this real advantage, that we are set upon securing the help of the faith-faculty. That will do much more and better for us than the sight-faculty ever, under any circumstances, could. Observe that, in a proper sense, we cannot be said to *love* things. We love persons. But the interest we have in things may help us toward loving persons. Our Lord's sacrifice, atonement, etc., are not objects of love, but helps toward our loving Christ. The faith-faculty is exercised about truth declared. It fashions from its own ideal of the person so revealed. And no worthy ideal of Christ, fashioned upon the basis of truth declared concerning Him, can ever disappoint. The sight-faculty does materially help us to love, but it keeps us under limitations, from which the faith-faculty wholly delivers. "Thomas, because thou hast seen Me thou hast believed; blessed are they that have *not seen* and yet have believed."

Vers. 11, 12. *The Unselfish Ministry of the Prophets.*—"Not unto themselves, but unto you, did they minister the things." And this they knew. This "was revealed to them." This they accepted as, for them, the duty of the hour. But there could not be a much harder lot. They pictured a glorious time; they lived in their imaginations; but for them it was all a dream, an anticipation, a vision of the far-away, which they knew could never become reality for them. But they were willing to serve others. It must have been hard for them. It must have been a great strain on character and faith. They saw the sufferings of Christ, they saw the spiritual glory that followed them. They saw the spiritual kingdom of Christ possess the earth, and they knew they would never breathe the air of that kingdom, or be employed in its service. Yet those old prophets do but illustrate the universally working law of service for God. You cannot do it if you want anything *for yourself*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13—16.

Self Discipline.—Christian privilege ought always to act upon us as an inspiration to duty. But the first sphere of the Christian's duty is *himself*, his own character, habits, and relationships. It never can be too constantly or too persuasively presented, that a Christian's power lies first in what he *is*. The service a renewed man can render, and is called to render, is the service of his own cultured self. "Among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life." "Ye are the salt of the earth." St. Peter has in mind, however, not only the duty of self-discipline, but the security that lies in it. The Christian who is diligently attentive to spiritual self-culture is guarded round, and protected safely from all the assaults of evil. Too much engaged, too interestedly occupied, to be overborne by any outward circumstances of persecution or trial. It may further be said that, in a well-ordered self-discipline the Christian finds so much personal pleasure that he is fully compensated for all losses of worldly pleasure which the self-culture may involve. Christian self-discipline is here seen to include:—

I. **Bracing up.**—"Girding up the loins of your mind." To His disciples our Lord gave the same counsel. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning" (Luke xii. 35). The figure is a familiar one, but it is more forcible when associated with the long, flowing garments of the East. The loose dress had to be turned up and bound round the waist, when active exertion was required. Thus, Elijah is said to have girded up his loins when he ran before the chariot of Ahab from Carmel to Jezreel (1 Kings xviii. 46), and the Lord required Job to "gird up his loins like a man," to listen to His sublime response (Job xxxviii. 3). In modern times athletes brace up, or gird, the body before exertion. What is represented in the moral sphere we can well understand. There is a resolute dealing with ourselves in the face of difficulties—to use a familiar expression, a "pulling of ourselves together"—which enables us to present a strong front to the adversary, and to endure what may involve serious strain. Something of this severe self-dealing is indicated in the psalmist's expression, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed." "I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress." Illustration may be taken from the soldiers in an enemy's country, and on some dangerous expedition. Day and night they keep fully attired and armed, get what sleep they can beside their horses, ready at any moment to spring into the saddle—always braced up. The "loins of the mind" are the resolves and purposes. They keep the mind occupied, and brace it up for its duty. A striking instance of bracing up the loins of the mind, and standing four square to every temptation and every foe, may be found in Joshua, who was *strong*, and could say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

II. **Self-restraint.**—"Be sober." Temperate in all things. Weakness attends upon excess in anything, partly because a rebound is sure to follow it, and all rebounds are perilous; partly because every excess tends to repeat itself, and the repetition involves entire loss of self-control. Moderation is essential to Christian virtue; and it has its application in the *religious* as well as the *moral* spheres. This, however, is seldom wisely insisted on, and many religious persons actually lose their power of self-restraint by excess in religious meetings, duties, and services. Self-restraint needs to be cultured in relation to everything. Physical health depends on our working up to, but never beyond, the limit of our powers, and so does moral health. But it is more practically helpful to show that each individual will find some particular sphere in which *he* is called to "be sober." And the mastery of himself in that particular thing will be found a triumph which carries with it his easy restraining and ruling of all other things. It may be shown that we all need to win the power of self-restraint in relation to the

"lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life." And the evils into which the unrestrained man falls may be vigorously described, as a warning against neglecting self-culture.

III. **Trust in provision and promise.**—"Set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you." It is possible to present the duty of self-restraint only on its sterner side, as the resolute mastery of tendencies that are evil. And doing this may give a severer view of the Christian life than is necessary. Self-culture is the nourishing of the good. There is the call to self-restraint that we may win good, as well as that we may control evil. St. Peter would have those he addressed master all depression, and fear, and indifference, and so set the Christian hope before them, that they should always be working towards its attainment. He really speaks of the grace that is "being brought" day by day, and not of some grace that is "to be brought" some one day. But it involves self-restraint for us to loosen the self-confidence so that we may wisely *trust*.

IV. **Distinct aim at holiness.**—"Be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living." Our Lord set this aim before His disciples. "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Self-discipline needs a pattern, a standard. It cannot be intelligent; it will not be wisely directed; it cannot hope to reach an effective result;—unless a man sees what he is restraining, disciplining himself unto. He is working at himself, at his moral character and relations; but to what end, after what pattern? When he has done his self-culturing work, what does he expect to be? Holiness, as God's holiness, is the distinctly Christian aim, and it is the aim of no other religion besides Christianity. Holiness is more than cleanness and fitness of relations. It is an inward state of mind and feeling which ensures that the relations must be pure and right. And it is purity with a bloom on it, that makes it attractive, and gives it a peculiar power of influence. But it is practical, not dreamy and sentimental; and therefore St. Peter says, "Be ye holy *in all manner of conversation*"; holy in all the turning about, all the associations, of life. That *tone* on all life would in the most marked way distinguish the Jewish Christians from the older Jews, and from all the heathen world around them.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 13. *Girding the Loins of the Mind.*—The figure is Oriental. The Orientals wore a loose and flowing robe, which, dangling about the feet, hindered swift, straight motion. When they would move quickly and with precision, they must needs gather the trailing garment into the girdle about the waist. You remember how the children of Israel were commanded to eat the passover. The passover was the door of their deliverance. The lamb, slain, and roasted whole, they were to eat. How? Standing, with travelling-staff in hand, *with loins girded*. A journey was before them. They were to *go forth* from Egypt. On that journey no trailing robes were to hold them back. A definite aim was theirs—to leave Egypt, and march toward freedom and nationality. They were to be harnessed toward that aim. Robes, trailing, flowing down and out, catching at stones, sweeping up sticks—robes to be trodden on, and so the cause of stumbling—might do for the smooth floors of Pharaoh's palace, might do for the even paths about their villages; but they would not do for men *on the march*. With *girded loins* they were to go forth. So, before these Christians to whom Peter wrote, there was an aim. They were to be sober, to hope to the end, to be obedient children, to refuse to live after the fashion of their former heathen lusts; they were to be holy, since He who had called them was holy. A shining and

gracious aim was theirs. And there was but one way for them to reach it; wherefore toward this aim *gird up the loins of your minds*, says the apostle. Thoughts, loose and wandering; thoughts heedlessly trailing over this thing and that; allowed imaginings of your former heathen lusts; the robes of your minds unbound, and let down to flow over whatever they may list;—such ungirded thoughts will be as hindering to you, O Christians, as would have been the loose robes of the Israelites on their desert march. Girded thoughts are what you need. All this is very close and practical. Here is a young man who has come to the consciousness of life's meaning and solemnity. "Ah," he says, "I must be sober; I must take for my life a strong and noble aim." But how may the young man make real and actual such aim? Here our Scripture comes in. By girded thought, not by thoughts loose and wandering. 1. What ungirds thoughts? (1) Pleasure as an end for life ungirds them. *Duty* is the sacrifice for the great altar of the life, and pleasure—recreation—is to come in only as it helps us lay that sacrifice more constantly and worthily upon that holy place. (2) Aimless and frivolous reading ungirds thoughts. (3) Bad associations, also, ungird thoughts. (4) Neglected Bibles and neglected secret prayers ungird thoughts. (5) Carelessness of attendance on religious services ungirds thoughts. (6) Sunday secular newspapers ungird thoughts. 2. What girds thoughts? (1) A high and determined purpose girds them. (2) Quick decisions for the Right gird thoughts. (3) Love for the true and good girds thoughts. The best and most helpful girdle for the thoughts is passionate devotion to the personal Christ.—*Anon.*

Spiritual Sobriety.—This injunction may refer inferentially to the practice of temperance as commonly understood; but its significance and scope are much deeper and wider than that. Writing of the surpassing excellence of that great salvation of which prophets had prophesied, into which angels desired to look, which had really been made known by the Spirit of God (ver. 12), Peter urges his readers to "gird up the loins of their mind"—*i.e.*, to call forth all their spiritual resources, that they may understand and appreciate it; he then bids them "be sober"—*i.e.*, exercise in this great matter a sound judgment, command themselves, not to be led to harmful extremes, or give way to illusions that would disappoint them, but maintain a manly, intelligent, healthful self-restraint. Doing this, they might "set their hope perfectly" [to the fullest possible limit] "on the grace that was being brought unto them at the revelation of Jesus Christ"—*i.e.*, they might confidently expect the largest and richest blessings which the manifestation of the grace of Christ was fitted to bring with it. We may strive and we may look for the greatest good, the fullest prosperity, in connection with the gospel, but at the same time we must cherish and exercise spiritual sobriety.

I. **In the acceptance of Christian doctrine.**—1. The Church at Thessalonica had a strong hold on the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh" was its watchword, its prevailing thought. It had a right to anticipate the hour when there would be another manifestation of its Lord. But it fell into insobriety of thought and of conduct in this matter. Its members thought that, as Jesus Christ might appear among them at any hour, they need not concern themselves with the ordinary duties of life, with provision for its bodily necessities; and they began to be "disorderly." They had to be rebuked by the apostle Paul (2 Thess. iii.), and summoned to be sober in doctrine and in deed. 2. The Church of Corinth had an unusual share of "gifts," particularly of this "gift of tongues." The members of that Church had a perfect right to make the most of its possession. But they were bound to hold their special powers in subordina-

tion to the great ends of glorifying Christ, and of edifying one another. This they did not do; they were not taking a sober view of the subject, and had to be corrected (1 Cor. xiv.). 3. It is a distinct Christian doctrine that we must be "separate" from the world; that while *in* it we are not to be *of* it. But the hermits of the earlier time, and the monks and nuns and the ascetics of a later, and of the present, time, fell into sad insobriety when they sought to retire altogether from the engagements and relationships of human life. Painful facts have superabundantly proved that we cannot decline what our heavenly Father offers us without doing ourselves harm rather than good. On the other hand, proof abounds on every side that in accepting the joys and filling the spheres which open to us in the providence of God, we may "walk holily, righteously, and blamelessly," and adorn the doctrine of our Saviour in all things. It is the sober view of separateness from the world which is the right, wise, Christian one. 4. That "we are justified by faith" is according to Scripture. By faith in Jesus Christ we have access to the grace of God; believing on Him we have eternal life. But when men say, as they have said, that when we have once believed, and been restored to the favour of God, we cannot forfeit His friendship by any folly, or even by any sin, they fall into the gravest spiritual insobriety; they push certain statements to an extreme, and they fall into dangerous, even destructive, error. 5. We are sanctified by the Spirit of God. When we have returned unto God and been received by Him, there remains much in us that has to be removed from us; there is much absent from us that has to be gained by us. We are not "complete in Him." The process of spiritual completion is the work of the Divine Spirit. But when it is maintained, as it has been, that if we only give our hearts to Him, and invite His entrance, and make entire surrender of ourselves, we may be instantaneously lifted up to the full height of holiness, then the mistake is made of not "being sober" in thought and in belief. Christian maturity is a growth; it is the gradual upbuilding ourselves on our holy faith; it is the result of a strenuous struggle; it is the consummation of a wise and true Christian course; it is the blessed consequence of daily prayer, of the continual reception into our minds of the thoughts of God, of much fellowship with Jesus Christ, of the wise use of all forms of Christian privilege, of active work in the field of sacred usefulness, of the lighter and also the severer discipline of the Lord of our life, of the wise Father of our spirit. That is the "sober" view, strongly substantiated by Scripture, constantly confirmed by the experience of the good.

II. **In the regulation of Christian life.**

III. **In the nourishment of Christian character.**—There is a kind of spiritual sustenance which is pleasant "to the flesh," but which is dangerous, if not delusive; it is that of perpetual religious excitement; the reading of those books, and the hearing of those sermons, which make an almost unbroken appeal to the imagination. This cannot be said to be taking milk (1 Cor. iii. 2), but drinking champagne. If we would build up a robust and fruitful Christian character we must eat the "strong meat" of Divine truth, which informs the mind, which enlarges the view, which braces the will, which sustains and strengthens the soul. There is much occasion here for attention to the apostolic admonition—be sober.—*William Clarkson, B.A.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 17—25.

The Fear of Son-like Sons.—The key-note of this passage is the sentence, "pass the time of your sojourning in *fear*." There is a godly fear, and there is

a slavish fear; the right fear of the child, and the wrong fear of the slave, or of the child in whom all right feeling is crushed. Such proper filial fear—

I. **Is based on right thoughts of God.**—The point of ver. 17 is brought out in the Revised Version. "And if ye call on Him as Father." But that is precisely what our Lord taught His disciples to do. "When ye pray, say, Abba, Father." A Christian is marked off from all the world by the thought he has of God, and the name in which he embodies his thought. He must, of course, seek to gain true and worthy thoughts of the Father, and they will always be such as the Lord Jesus Christ had, which led Him to address God as "Holy Father," "Righteous Father." It is thought that if men call God "Father," they will think of him after the patterns of human fatherhood; but surely that is fully guarded against by associating the thought of *God* with the thought of fatherhood. What is added to our thought of God, by calling Him Father, is His personal interest in each one of us; His personal affection for each one; and His personal service to each one. There is no more reverent name than father, and no more reverent relation than father and son. The fear men have for a "thundering Jove," or for an autocratic king, is ignoble when compared with that which they have for their fathers; and the fear of son-like sons of the Father-God is an altogether refined, gracious, inspiring, and ennobling feeling; it is the secret of the beautiful life.

II. **Is based on right thoughts of redemption.**—"Knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, . . . but with precious blood." The expression, "from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers," makes precise application of the passage to the Jewish Christians, who had been brought over from formal Judaism into spiritual Christianity. The rest of the verses may be taken with a general application. They express the idea of redemption which will always nourish a true and worthy fear. Our redemption was a costly ransom: our liberty unto righteousness was obtained at a priceless price. In common life the cost of a thing puts a value on it, and we fear to lose it, or to damage it. And that is a right fear, the fear we should have for our spiritual life, because of the cost of its purchase. A cost only the more impressive that it is not weighted as silver and gold, but is spiritual value, life, even Divine life, figured for us as "precious blood." "That blood, the life which it represented, poured out upon the cross, took its place among the things that were not corruptible." The reference to the "lamb" is probably due to St. Peter's thinking of John's famous sentence, "Behold the Lamb of God." *Mason* has a good note. "How Christ's death freed them from their 'vain conversation' is not explained here; but we may give a twofold explanation. Historically, it did so, because, when they came to realise that their Messiah could only reach His glories through suffering, it gave them a new insight into the whole meaning of the system under which they had been brought up. It did also, however, doubtless, in a more mysterious way, such as we cannot imagine, procure in God's sight their emancipation." "The whiteness, the helplessness, the youth, the innocence, and the patience, of the lamb, make it a natural symbol of our Lord."

III. **Is based on right thoughts of present claims** (ver. 22).—"Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart, fervently." It is the constant teaching of the apostles that Christianity makes two claims on men; first, the claim to love God; then the claim to love one another. And just as heart-love to God will guarantee the right service of God, so heart-love for the brethren will ensure and preserve right relations with them, and the due fulfilment of all brotherly duties. St. John puts the connection between the love of God and the love of the brethren in a very strong and impressive sentence: "If a man say,

I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen. And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also."

The present claim, then, is to "love the brethren," and the claim involves every service that love can render to them. But the question may properly be asked, Is it possible to make ourselves love? The answer is twofold. 1. We can create an ideal which is lovable, and which we cannot help loving; and we can see that ideal in our brethren, when they are not lovable in themselves. Our ideal is Christ. We cannot help loving Him wherever we find Him. 2. Though we cannot make ourselves love, we can put ourselves in such relations as will help to inspire love. We often find that knowing persons in the intimacy of life, in common work, or common sorrow, brings round to us a love for them which we should not otherwise have felt. And the apostles are so anxious about keeping up the *fellowship*, because that is the secret of keeping up the *love*.

IV. **Is based on right thoughts of fleeting time.**—And the particular thought is, that all that belongs to the material, sensuous, earthly life is touched with this weakness—it is uncertain, transitory. Time stamps everything as frail. All time-conditioned things are below man, when man is seen to be a spiritual being. The regenerate man, begotten again of the incorruptible seed, is not time-conditioned, and nothing that he does is time-conditioned. Spiritual life belongs to the sphere of things permanent and abiding. By cherishing such thoughts as these we may dignify that new life with which we are quickened, and make altogether more important its culture, and its expression, in holy life and service, than the attainment of any earthly good, since on such attainment must always rest the frailty that belongs to the seen, the temporal, the transitory. Only the man who keeps in right relations with the spiritual and permanent can ever hope to be, or to keep, in right relations with the temporal and transitory.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 21. *Three Stages of Faith.*—What is the point of this text? It sets forth *who* is the final object of faith. It is God. Herein the text may appear to differ from the usual run of texts in the gospels and epistles: *e.g.*, "By faith which is in Me" (Christ). "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Can we find out the harmony of these apparently differing statements? This must certainly be the first and most absolute of truths: man's glory and blessedness come of trusting God. Illustrate from Enoch, Abraham, Jacob, Davidic psalms, prophecies, etc. Such trust in God sets man right with God. Failing in such trust shows man to be wrong. Self-trust involves distrust of God. Still, it is the fact, that man has to be helped to trust by some agency—medium, mediator. Now, to St. Peter Christ seemed to be the highest, most efficient help to this faith in God. For the Jew, who has faith in God, Christ is the clearing, enlarging, and perfecting of faith. For the Gentile, Christ is the medium by which faith in God is reached. As Christianly-educated, we occupy in some degree the Jew-place. But, more truly, we follow on the line of the Gentile, and reach the full saving relation to God by three stages of faith.

I. **First stage of faith.**—*Faith in Christ.* See the prominent place of Christ in the New Testament; in preaching; in the early experience of Christians. And yet, when the gospels are carefully studied, we are impressed by the persistency with which Jesus always puts God the Father *first*. Observe how well fitted Christ was to

win the trust of men. Notice His appeals (1) to man's understanding by His truth; (2) to man's reverence by His miracles; (3) to man's conscience by His appeals and by His life; (4) to man's affections by His Spirit; (5) to man's emotions by His cross. The whole man is swayed toward faith by the influence of Christ.

II. **Second stage of faith.**—*God's relation to Christ.* There was more in Christ than even the apostles could at first see. The relation does not come out during our Lord's life. Then God *witnesses* to Him. The relation comes to view in His resurrection, ascension, and glorification. Then He comes to be apprehended as *God in Christ.* Sometimes it is said that Christ raised Himself, usually it is said that God raised Him, from the dead. Resurrection, and Christ in heaven, bring *God* into prominence.

III. **Third stage of faith.**—*In God.* This is reached actually, as a result of Christian experience; but not always consciously. So, through Christ, the perfect restoration is effected, and man's faith and hope are set *on God.* See in this faith in God (1) our perfect communion with Old Testament saints, (2) the true mediatorial work of Christ; He is bringing many sons unto the glory of this higher faith in God.

The Father's Part in the Work of Redemption.

I. **The part that the Father bore in the work of redemption.**—1. He ordained His Son to the mediatorial office. 2. He manifested Him to the world. 3. After suffering Him to be put to death, He raised Him up from the dead. 4. He exalted Him to heaven, and invested Him with all heaven's glory.

II. **The effect that the consideration of this is intended to produce upon us.** It should—(1) Confirm our faith; (2) enliven our hope. Address (1) those who are in unbelief; (2) those who yield to doubts and fears.—*C. Simeon, M.A.*

The Agent and Cause of Faith.—The redeemed are also described here by their faith and hope, the cause of which is Jesus Christ. "You do by Him believe in God"—by Him as the author, encourager, support, and finisher, of your faith; your faith and hope may now be in God, as reconciled to you by Christ the Mediator. God in Christ is the ultimate object of a Christian's faith, which is strongly supported by the resurrection of Christ, and the glory that did follow.—*Matthew Henry.*

The Final Object of Saving Faith.—Already we are getting our springtime remindings of resurrection. Nature has begun her teachings. At times we feel the pleasant sunshine and the warmth of the air. Already the drooping snowdrops, the pale primrose, and the brilliant yellow daffodil have begun to whisper to us that winter is gathering up her skirts, and preparing to hasten away. Nature keeps her own times, and even now the "time of the singing of birds is come," and the "flowers appear on the earth." At this time we naturally cherish resurrection thoughts, and dwell on His being raised from the dead who has "brought life and immortality to light by His gospel." The resurrection, of which all else seems to be but the shadow, and the symbol, and the suggestion, is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. But that should never be regarded as standing alone; it includes and involves our resurrection in Him, first from sin, and then from the grave. "Because He lives, we shall live also." Three visions rise before us. We see Christ rising from the grave, "leading captivity captive, and receiving gifts for men." We see the human soul rising from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, in response to the awakening call of Him who "liveth for ever and ever." And we see that day of days, for which all other days were made, when "all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth." In the text the reference to

the resurrection is necessary, but it is subordinate to the purpose of the apostle. It stands in relation to another point which is more directly occupying the writer's attention. He is really meeting a question which was then anxiously asked; which has always been anxiously asked; and which is anxiously asked to-day. Who is the final object of our faith? The apostle at first surprises us—upsets our cherished ideas. He says, *God* is the final object of our faith. God who was in Christ. God as He who raised up Christ from the dead. "Who, by Him, do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead, . . . that your faith and hope may be in God." In this way of putting the truth, there is at least a seeming variation from many familiar passages in the Acts and in the Epistles. "The Son of Man must be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." The eunuch said, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God." The jailor at Philippi was required to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that he might be saved." The apostle John declares, "He that hath the Son hath life." It is perfectly certain that Peter could have had no intention of setting aside, or in any way dishonouring, Christ, when he put the truth in the particular way in which we find it presented in our text. How, then, can we set out the harmony of these two differing kinds of statement. Our faith is to be in *Christ*. And yet our faith is, through Christ, to be in *God*. This much is quite clear: the first, and the most absolutely universal of all truths is, that man's blessedness comes, and can only come, out of trusting God. Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, all lived before the Mosaic period, and they believed God, and it was counted to them for righteousness. The foundation law of Mosaism is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart." But love implies a foregoing faith, on which alone the love can rest. The psalms are full of expressions of trust, but they are all trustings in God. The prophets unite to bid us "Trust in the Lord for ever"; and they assure us that the "just by faith shall live." But this is also evidently true; man has always needed to be helped to trust in God by some *medium*, or *agency*. Vision and promise helped Abraham to his trust. Moses was the medium or mediator who helped the people of Israel to their trust. That trust alone sets man the creature in right relations with God the Creator and Father. He requires it, and we ought to give it. This must be clearly seen to stand as the absolute first and universal truth: man's salvation—man's realisation of his fullest and best possibility—comes out of trusting God. To the mind of Peter, Jesus Christ seemed to be the highest, the most perfect, the most gracious help to saving faith in God. Jesus Christ was to him God's own way of helping His people to the trust in Him which saves. Peter wrote his epistle for Gentile Christians, as distinguished from Jewish Christians. It was he who opened the door to the Gentiles in recognising the Christian faith and standing of Cornelius the centurion. His epistle is addressed to the "strangers scattered abroad," and we may properly look for some precise adaptations of the Christian truths to their circumstances and points of view. For the Jew, who knows God, the one living God, the truth could be put in this form by the great, the Divine Teacher: "Ye believe in God; believe also in Me." "This is life eternal, to know Thee the only true God." For the Gentile, who only comes upon the right knowledge of God through the revelation which centres in the "Man Christ Jesus," the truth can best be put in this form by the disciples of the great Teacher: "Who by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead." Gentiles must be set looking to Christ as the sole medium through which the right, the worthy knowledge of God can come. There is a sense in which, being Christianly educated, we occupy the

place of the Jew. We come into personal relations with Christianity through a previous suitable apprehension of God; and yet we may more truly be said to follow along the line of the Gentile; for it is only through our Lord's humanity that we can ever gain the right impression of His Divinity. It must be man first, then the God-man. The partaker of flesh and blood seen at last to be "God manifest in the flesh." Personal religion of trustful love and devotion to Christ, leading us into saving and sanctifying relations with God—the One, the Triune God. More or less distinctly there can be traced three stages in the growth of Christian experience. There are three steps in Christian faith. By faith we come, in a regular advance, to apprehend three things. 1. Christ. 2. God's relation to Christ. 3. God. Christian experience arrives at its perfection when God is "all in all." On the Mount of Transfiguration, when the cloud had passed, the disciples saw "Jesus only." On the Mount of Beatification, when all the cloud shadows of earth shall have passed, the disciples of Jesus will see "God only." "Then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all."

I. **The first stage of faith is faith in Jesus Christ.**—You cannot want me either to show, or to prove, or to vindicate the fact that the Lord Jesus has the most prominent place in the New Testament, in preaching, in teaching, in thinking, in writing, or in early religious experience. If there is anything self-evident, that is. Fully, heartily, rejoicingly acknowledging that fact, there is, nevertheless, something very remarkable that comes into view when we come to study it carefully. Christ always puts the Father *before Himself*. He never proposes to absorb the faith and love of His disciples. He receives them only that thus He might help the disciples into the love and trust of the Father. He says, "My Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works." "My Father is greater than I." "Your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of." "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by Me." "I do always the things that please Him." At first Christ is presented to the seeking soul, and He fills all his vision. And we could dwell long and lovingly on the ways in which Jesus Christ is fitted for winning the love and trust of men. He appeals to man's understanding by the truths which He reveals and teaches—momentous truths concerning God and man, and sin, and salvation, and righteousness, and the future. He appeals to the reverence of men by the miracles, which declare that in Him is the great power of God. He appeals to men's consciences by presenting the standard of the perfect human life. He appeals to men's affections by His Divine tenderness, and pitying gentleness, and love. He sways the deepest emotions of men by the persuasions of His cross. Jesus Christ, in His human manifestation, in His earthly life of sympathy and of suffering, has a strange power on us. He seems at first to fill the whole foreground, and sways our whole manhood toward faith. Peter speaks the truth for *us* when He speaks of Jesus Christ in this way. "Whom, having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

II. **The second stage of faith is faith in God's relation to Christ.**—Once setting our heart on Christ, our faith wants to know better Him on whom it rests. Evidently there are more and deeper things in Jesus Christ than the soul can see in its first apprehensions of Him; than even the apostles could find out while they were with their Master in the limited fellowship of the flesh. Many of their fuller and deeper apprehensions come out to view in their epistles, which are precisely this: soul-readings of the mystery of Christ, in the illumination of the Holy Ghost. Only to one point of this can our attention now be given. In

Christian life there is a strong, masterful instinct, which makes us linger, with chief interest and concern, about the records of our Lord's resurrection. It is not peculiar to us in these days. The evangelists did; the apostles did. Paul writes, "It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again." "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." Now, what is it comes to view when we let the apostles guide us into the mysteries of the resurrection? This: God was in the closest relation to the Redeemer's work. Sometimes it is indicated that Christ raised Himself, by His own inherent power; but usually it is intimated, as in our text, that God raised Him. The salvation was God's, but it was wrought out by Christ, and in Him. The suggestions of resurrection and ascension are full of God, and they open to us the larger, richer meanings of familiar texts, such as these: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." In the second stage faith embraces both God and Christ, as working together in the accomplishment of human salvation.

III. **The third stage of faith is faith in God, which swallows up, absorbs, the faith in Jesus.**—But this stage of faith is usually reached unconsciously. Many an advanced, experienced Christian stands high up on this level to-day, but does not know it, and would be half frightened if any one were to tell him that it was so with him. When I was a youth, and in the early periods of religious experience, I used to attend regularly the prayer-meetings, and found them specially helpful. I remember being struck with something which has given a key-note to the Christian thinking of my whole life. I observed that the young Christians prayed to *Jesus*, and the old Christians prayed to *God*. And I knew they both meant the same thing. In the young Christians' prayers God was hardly mentioned. In the old Christians' prayers Jesus was hardly mentioned. There is the sign of the growth of the Christian knowledge and experience. We begin, and we see Jesus, and God is in Jesus. We grow, and more and more we see God, until at last we see God only, and Jesus is in God. It remains still true that all the forms of thought are taken from Christ. The Christ-help to right thought, and view, and feeling, never passes away; but really the soul's resting has come to be in God. And thus, in the most spiritual fashion, Christ's work of restoration is fully accomplished for the individual. We apprehend God in Christ, we trust God, and so Christ is the means by which all Christ's brothers are brought to His own son-like obedience to God, and trust in Him. Our faith and hope at last are fully set on God, and the law of life is fulfilled —God is become "all in all." There are things suggested by this setting of truth, on which I invite you to dwell, meditatively, in the quiet hours of this day. 1. See the perfectness of our communion with all the Old Testament saints. A fellowship, not in the *means* by which they and we are helped to God, but a fellowship in the *end*. For, whether by angel-manifestation, symbolical ceremony, prophetic declaration, or the human life and teachings of the Son of God, we are all moving to one goal; for us all there is but one soul-rest —it is the rest that comes from the full trust, which carries our whole selves, and lays them on the everlasting arms of God. Enoch lay there. Abraham lay there. Moses lay there. Jesus Himself lay there. The whole round world is bound about with this golden chain of trust in God. One way or another, this way and every way, the souls of men are being caught, turned, helped to trust in God. 2. Dwell lovingly on

the preciousness of that particular agency by which *we* have been thus caught, and drawn into our full trusting in God. I only heard Mr. Spurgeon preach a few times, but on one occasion he seemed to me to surpass himself, and thrilled us all with the holy passion of his utterance, childlike as the sermon was in its simplicity. He had taken as his text the words, "This is my beloved; this is my friend." And the sermon was just a series of boastings and gloryings over Jesus, each section closing with the appeal, "'This is *my* Beloved,' will you make Him *yours*?" I should like to have my time open still, so that I might thus boast over Jesus my Saviour before you now. He is "worthy of more glory than Moses." Poets did but sing out the deepest feeling of all loving souls, when they called Him—

"Thou highest, sweetest, fairest One
That eyes have seen, or angels known."

3. But shall we be content to stay with the human manifestation of Christ, with His life and with His death? Or shall we be willing to let Him lead us on to the holier mysteries of His resurrection, and show us that, trusting Him, we are really trusting God, who "raised Him from the dead." Are you willingly staying down on the low-levels of spiritual apprehension? or are you climbing the heights where the air is pure and clear, and the soul can see the eternal realities, and even the Christ-garment of God has fallen off Him, and the sky is pure blue from rim to rim—not one cloud sails across to throw a shadow, and you think, you feel, you know, that Christ has "delivered up the kingdom to the Father"? You see God only, and God is all in all. It is heaven all about you on those heights of spiritual experience. At last, helped by Christ—so sweetly helped by Christ—you have come to this, and this has gained the forever stamp—

"Your faith and hope are in God."

Ver. 22. *Fervent Love of the Brethren.*—Selfishness, or the exaggerated love of self, was the source and seal of the fall of man. Love of God in Christ, through the power of the Spirit; and love of mankind, but most of all, love of those with whom God's children shall dwell through all eternity—this is peculiarly and pre-eminently the work of the Holy Spirit. St. Peter is admonishing the brethren to abide in Christian kindness and affection; and he bids them consider the very purpose that God has wrought.

I. **The work accomplished.**—"Seeing ye have purified your souls." The grand point is having the heart good. The heart is impure. What vain thoughts, evil inclinations, presumptuous actions, vain fancies, are continually gushing forth, as from a deep stream! To be pure in heart is to be pure in life. Man is not a passive subject, but an active agent. There must be co-operation, on our part, with the influence of the mighty Spirit of God, otherwise there can be no purifying of the soul.

II. **The instrument of its accomplishment.**—"Ye obey the truth." It is a law of almost universal obtaining that, as we can do nothing without God, so, generally He will do nothing without us. He acts on the heart in order to achieve what He would have done; and so, in all the business of life, we have certain means to employ; and if we neglect them, or try to substitute our own, we have our toil in vain. The Divinely constituted means to the purifying of men's souls is the truth. When men are disposed to find fault with God's Word, and to discover imperfections in it, His people should honour it, cling to it, maintain it, exalt it, cherish it. To be immortal, great, and good, let a man study God's Word. The grand point is to look beyond the instrument to the omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit.

III. **One special result of this work.**—"Unfeigned love of the brethren." It is not merely love and charity to all men, but specially and specifically love of those united to us in a new birth, in new relationship to God, many mem-

bers in one body. This yearning affection is one of the most blessed signs that a man has purified his soul, by obeying the truth.

IV. **The beautiful exhortation.**—"See that ye love one another with a pure heart, fervently." Do not mistake the injunction. We must not confound the precious jewel with the metal in which the jewel is placed, "Fervently." With a pure, unselfish love, with no sinister motive. "Without dissimulation." There must be no appearance, no pretence, but the reality. "Fervent," not cold. How fervent in heaven, where all tin and dross are purged away, the soul will be, swallowed up in the love of God! 1. *If you desire to be holy and happy, set about it in the name of the Lord Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, and in obedience.*—You may judge materially how far the work is progressing, if you feel a glowing love to the Father for Jesus' sake, and desire as you have opportunity to do good unto all men." 2. *We must not attempt to do this in our own strength and resolution.*—Philanthropy, intellectual culture, moral training, are beautiful, but there must be the power of the Spirit of God. 3. *You must cultivate that spirit* always and ever.—*Canon Hugh Stowell, M.A.*

Vers. 24, 25. *The Transitory and the Permanent.*—This passage is brought before our minds every early summer time, by the sight and smell of the fields. The "fashion of this world passeth away." "The Word of the Lord endureth for ever." Away from changing, passing, transitory earth we may look upward to God, saying, "He liveth; and blessed be my Rock." St. Peter evidently had in mind the poetical passage in the fortieth chapter of Isaiah. The figure of the grass is sufficiently impressive to us who see the swathes lying in the path of the mower; but it is more effective in the East, where the sudden blasts of scorching wind burn up the vegetation in an hour, and change freshness and flowers for barrenness and death. The Word of God endures for ever. It cannot be likened to anything on which rests the earthly stamp. It is not even like the giant trees, which grow on while the grass and the flowers of a hundred summers flourish and fade beneath them; for at last even the trees fail to respond to the wakening spring-breath, and the great trunks and branches crumble down to dust, and pass away. It is not even like the mighty hills, which, towering high above us, seem to have their foundations in the very centre of the earth. They also are weathering down, and shall one day change and pass. It is not even like the vast firmament, which keeps, through summer and through winter, its broad expanse of blue, though clouds all blackness, or clouds silver-tinged, sweep in ever-varying shapes across it; for at last "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise." The Word of God is His revelation—His entire revelation. Not the Bible only, but every testimony that He is pleased to make to men of His will. Every utterance of God is permanent; it endures up to the very uttermost limit of necessity for it.

I. **The transient character of all earthly things.**—Everything has a body and a soul; a form that can be apprehended by our senses, that we may see and touch, and a mysterious and invisible substance, which is its real self, and of which the form is only the expression. George Macdonald's saying may be applied to things as well as to persons. "We are accustomed to say that we *are* bodies, and *have* souls; whereas we should rather say, we *are* souls and *have* bodies." Within everything there is a soul that abides—that is its real self—however its form may change. The grass of each springtime falls before the mower, but the spirit of the grass abides through all the generations. The million flowers of gay and pleasant summer-time fade and drop away, but the work of the flowers, in the toned and scented air, and in the pleasure they

give, abides long after they have passed.

"The lily dies not, when both flower and leaf
Fade, and are strewed upon the chill, sad ground;
Gone down for shelter to its mother-earth,
'Twill rise, re-bloom, and shed its fragrance round."

All nature seems to echo the message of the grass. The winter snow falls lightly, and lies in its white purity—mystic, wonderful—over all the land. But so soon it soils, and browns, and sinks, and passes all away! The spring flowers that come, responsive to the low sunshine and the gentle wind, are so fragile, they stay with us only such a little while, and then they pass away! The summer blossoms multiply, and stand thick over the ground, and they seem so strong in their rich, deep colours; yet they, too, wither and droop, and pass away. The autumn fruits cluster on the branches, and grow big in their ripening, but they, too, are plucked in due season, and pass away. The gay dress of varied leafage is soon stripped off by the wild winds and passes away. Down every channel of the hillside is borne the crumblings wasted from the "everlasting hills" that really are passing away. The hard trap rocks that hold in the wintry sea are yet worn down with its ceaseless chafing, and are passing away. And man!—does he differ from the things in the midst of which he is set? Nay, what a little thing is human life, even at the longest! We can scarcely reach to do anything great, or to get within sight of a life's great purpose, before the call comes, bidding us away. It is not only true of us, it is true of *our work*. All the *glory*—all the goodliness—of man's genius and enterprise and effort—it is all "as the flower of the field." Man's strength, and wisdom, and riches, and learning, and honour, and beauty, and science, and art—all are subject to change and decay. The moth and rust eat into them, and the thief steals them away. This is—1. Impressively seen in the changes of our Church life. In a few years a congregation entirely passes away. 2. It is true of the very forms and modes in which one man strives to help and bless another. Some men's ways of presenting God's truth to us do help us more than the ways of others. But even our spiritual helpers do not stay with us long.

II. **The permanent character of all Divine things.**—Especially of all Divine revelations and declarations, for these are properly gathered into the term, the "Word of God." Everything that speaks to our souls of God is a revelation to us. It may be a touch of nature. It may be only a pure white flower. It may be the pale gold and green of a late sunset. It may be the snowy crest of an Alpine mountain, lying still and pure against the summer's deep blue sky. It may be the weird mist of the gloaming, creeping over the landscape. It may be the glimpse down some woodland vale of the "many twinkling sea." It may be the solemn shadows of the secluded mountain tarn. It may be the great thunder-noise of God, echoing through the valleys. It may be the voice of some fellow man, translating into human words for us the great thoughts of God. Howsoever the Word of God may come into our souls, it is true for ever. All things that our souls hear, and feel, and know, are Divine, and permanent, and eternal things. When the very soul of nature speaks to our souls, its message is Divine and eternal. Have you forgotten when you first heard the voice of the flowers? They lived, and spoke to you of God. Have you forgotten the quiet lying on the country hill-side, when lost strength was slowly returning, and in the stillness, the very music of the earth seemed to be heard, creation hymning its chorus, "Praise God, praise God!" When God speaks to us by Divine providence, the message is permanent; our souls get it, and keep it for ever. The spiritual influences of our life-experiences are eternal. That revelation of redemption—if it is really made

to our souls—is a permanent revelation. Everything that pleads in us for duty is eternal, because all such things bear on character, and character endures; its flower never withers nor falls; God puts upon it the immortal stamp, and crowns it with the eternal righteousness. Every voice that brings truth home to the soul is permanent. Every uplifting of the mystery of being that gives us a glimpse of reality, and a new hold on God, is permanent. All God's comfortings abide with us. The troubles pass, but the "everlasting arms" stay underneath us. God's comforts suit the moment, but they last for ever. And when God kindles hope, it is hope that cannot disappoint, that will never make ashamed. In the "Life of Dr. Horace Bushnell," it is stated that the following words of his were found dimly pencilled on a stray sheet of paper. Referring to the time of his infancy, when he "came out in this rough battle with winds, winters, and wickedness," he says, "My God, and my good mother, both heard the cry, and went to the task of strengthening me and comforting me together, and were able ere long to get a smile upon my face. . . . Long years ago she vanished; but God stays by me still, embraces me in my gray hairs as tenderly and carefully as she did in my infancy, and gives to me, as my joy, and the principal glory of my life, that He lets me know Him, and helps me with real confidence to call Him my Father." It is true, but we need not trouble over it—"the fashion of this world passeth away." It is true, and we will join in saying it with an exceeding great joy—"The Word of our God shall stand for ever."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Ver. 5. *Kept by God.*—The Rev. J. H. Brooks, D.D., says: "If your final salvation depends on your holding out or holding on, you will most certainly be lost. Two ministers were conducting a meeting together, and at its close one of them said, 'I picked up a Dublin tract on a railroad train the other day, and with great interest and profit, although it teaches a doctrine I don't believe.' 'What is the doctrine?' asked his friend. 'The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints,' he answered. 'Neither do I believe it,' was the reply. 'Is it possible?' exclaimed the first. 'I thought you were decided in your belief of it.' 'No, I am not. I once believed it, but since I have come to know more about the saints, and especially about myself, I believe all of us would go to the devil if left to ourselves; but I believe very firmly in the perseverance of the Lord;' and they shook hands to show their fellowship in this truth."

Vers. 6, 7. *The Purpose for which Trials are Sent.*—When Joseph Alleine and seven other ministers, and forty private Christians, were committed to the prison of Ilchester about two hundred years ago, Alleine said much to cheer them. Among other sweet things, he said: "Shall I tell you a story I read? There was a certain king that had a pleasant grove, and that he might make it every way delightful to him, he caused some birds to be caught, and to be kept in cages till they had learned sundry sweet and artificial tunes. And when they were perfect in their lessons, he let them abroad out of their cages into the grove, that he might hear them singing those pleasant tunes, and teaching them to other birds of milder note. Brethren," he added, "the Lord is that king, this grove is His Church, these birds are yourselves, this cage is the prison; and God hath sent you hither that you should learn the sweet and pleasant notes of His praise."

Ver. 7. *Trial of Faith.*—When a founder has cast his bell, he does not at once put it into the steeple, but tries it with the hammer, and beats it on every side, to see if there be a flaw. So when Christ converts a man, He does not at once convey him to heaven, but suffers him first to be beaten upon by many temptations, and then exalts him to his crown.

Ver. 8. *Loving the Unseen.*—A mother in England taught her little child that his father was away in India. As soon as he could lisp his father's name, his picture was shown him, and he was taught to say, "That's my papa." Though he had never seen his father to know him, yet through that mother's faithful teaching he had learned to love him. One day, unexpectedly to all, the father returned from India, and as he entered the hall door, his little son was the first to greet him, exclaiming as he did so, "My dear

papa, I am so glad to see you." So the Bible pictures before us Christ, our Elder Brother, "whom, having not seen, we love," and of whom we sing, "He's my Saviour." By-and-bye, when we behold Him face to face, we shall know Him and meet Him, not as a stranger, but as a friend.

Faith and Reason.—An old writer says Faith and Reason may be compared to two travellers. Faith is like a man in full health, who can walk his twenty or thirty miles at a time without suffering; Reason is like a little child, who can only with difficulty accomplish three or four miles. Well, says this old writer, on a given day Reason says to Faith, "O good Faith, let me walk with thee." Faith replies, "O Reason, thou canst never walk with me." Well, they set out together; when they come to a deep river, Reason says, "I can never ford this." When they reach a lofty mountain, there is the same exclamation of despair; and in such cases Faith, in order not to leave Reason behind, is obliged to carry him on his back; and, adds the writer, "Oh, what a luggage is Reason to Faith!"

Faith as the Eye of the Soul.—Faith is a grace that has both its birth and life in light, and in that light it sees light. Faith is not only a hand, but an eye, to the soul, and hath its sights both in way of *aspect* and *prospect*, not only to look on things immediately before it, but to look on things far hence and to come; it can see things that are invisible. Some things are invisible in respect of their nature; so God is, and so spirits are. Some things are invisible in respect of their *distance*, they are not yet present with us, but are things to come; faith can see both these. It is true we have not the sight of *sense*, but we have a sight as noble, yea, and in some respects, more excellent than that of sense. The sight of faith is more *full* and *certain* than that of sense. We have, indeed, not a *perfect* sight, but we have such a sight which God hath vouchsafed to His poor ones in the world, that by the power of it they may be enabled to walk through all the conditions, how dark and sad soever.—*Symonds* (1651).

Ver. 16. *An African Figure of Holiness.*—Dr. Livingstone once asked a Bechuana what he understood by the word "holiness" (*foitsepho*). He answered, "When copious showers have descended during the night, and all the earth and leaves and cattle are washed clean, and the sun rising shows a drop of dew on every blade of grass, and the air breathes fresh—that is holiness.

Ver. 19. *The Precious Blood.*—One evening two soldiers were placed as sentries at the opposite ends of a sallyport or long passage, leading from the rock of Gibraltar to the Spanish territory. One of them, from the reading of the sacred Scriptures, was rejoicing in God his Saviour; while the other, from the same cause, was in a state of deep mental anxiety, being under strong convictions of sin, and earnestly seeking deliverance from the load of guilt that was pressing upon his conscience. On the evening alluded to, one of the officers, who had been out dining, was returning to the garrison at a late hour, and coming up to the sentry on the outside of the sallyport, and who was the soldier recently converted, he asked, as usual, for the watchword. The man, absorbed in meditation on the glorious things that had recently been unfolded to him, and filled with devout gratitude and love, on being roused from his midnight reverie, replied to the officer's challenge with the words, "*The precious blood of Christ.*" He soon, however, recovered his self-possession, and gave the correct watchword. But his comrade, who was anxiously seeking the Lord, and who was stationed as sentry at the other or inner end of the sallyport, a passage specially adapted for the conveyance of sound, heard the words, "*the precious blood of Christ*," mysteriously borne upon the breeze at the solemn hour of midnight. The words came home to his heart as a voice from heaven; the load of guilt was removed, and the precious blood of Christ spoke peace to the soul of the sin-burdened soldier. He was afterwards, with others of his regiment, drafted for service in India, and proceeded to the island of Ceylon, where a long career of usefulness opened up before him, and where he became the honoured instrument, in the hands of the Lord, for the completion of a great and important work. Soon after arriving in Ceylon, his discharge was procured from his regiment, that he might fill the office of master of the principal school in Colombo, for which he was well qualified by a good education in early life. He soon acquired an intimate knowledge of the Cingalese language, and as a translation of the Bible into that tongue was lying in an unfinished state, owing to the death of the individual who commenced the work, he set himself to the task, and completed the Cingalese version of the Scriptures, which was afterwards printed by the British and Foreign Bible Society in four quarto volumes.

CHAPTER II.

CHRISTIAN LIFE CALLS FOR THE PUTTING AWAY OF EVILS.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

THE Jewish Christians addressed in this epistle are thought of as "born again" into the Christian faith and life. The key-note of the epistle is "hath begotten us again" (chap. i. 3) and "being born again" (chap. i. 23). The idea that on professing faith in Christ a man enters on and begins a new life, as a spiritual babe, in a spiritual atmosphere, in which, and in receipt of spiritual nourishment, he is to grow up into the fulness of the spiritual man in Christ, is decidedly Pauline. But St. Peter makes a special application of it to the Jews who became Christians, and might plead that they were already born of God, and that Christianity involved no vital change in their standing and relations; it was really no more than an unfolding, or reformation, of the life unto God which they already had. Both St. Paul and St. Peter distinctly claim for the Christian profession that it is a *new life*, beginning with a new spiritual birth, in the power of the Holy Spirit. If this is fully apprehended, the substance of the epistle will be understood as a varied help toward the training and shaping and nourishing of the spiritual babe up through its stages of growth, and the ordering of the various relations into which the babe must come as it grows. But there is a Jewish blending of figures and ideas taken from the old dispensation which is sometimes a little difficult for us to follow, but which would be very suggestive to those familiar with Judaism, who were directly addressed in the epistle. This chapter has been described as an exhortation to realise the idea of the *new Israel*. "The apostle bids them put away all elements of disunion, and combine into a new Temple, founded on Jesus as the Christ, and into a new hierarchy and theocracy." Personally each professor of faith in Christ had begun a new life. Unitedly those who professed faith in Christ constituted a newly founded race, a spiritual Israel, a kingdom of priests.

Ver. 1. **Wherefore.**—Because the new life has begun for you. There is something befitting that new life. There are things associated with the old life which are manifestly unfitting, and must be put away. The things mentioned are precisely the besetting sins of the *Jewish* character. **Laying aside.**—The counsel implies recognition of their power to deal both with wrong feelings toward others and with wrong expressions of such feelings. Literally it is "having laid aside," and it is implied that this is involved in the old life being ended, and the new life begun. This is what *ought* to be. St. Peter urges them to *make* things be as they ought to be (compare St. Paul's teaching concerning the lingering corruptions of the "old man," as in Rom. vii.). **Malice.**—Generally *wickedness*, or disposition to injure others; perhaps resentment of supposed wrong, which was a characteristic evil of the Jewish mind. The relations of the Jewish Christians and Jews would provide easy occasion for such resentments. **Guile.**—The great weakness of Jewish character in every age. The Laban taint in the Abrahamic race. **Hypocrisies.**—Like, yet distinct from, "guile." The idea here would be met by "insincerities," over-anxiety to make a Christian appearance. The apostle would say "be genuine," do not strain for effect. Let the new life grow naturally, and show itself and express itself how it will. We might put his counsel in this shape: "Beware of cant and sentimentality." **Envies.**—These would spoil the fellowship of the Christians among themselves. **Evil speakings.**—With special reference to the characters of others. St. Peter would support the motto *nil, nisi bonum*. Augustine thus marks the significance of these terms: "*Malice* delights in another's hurt; *envy* pines at another's good; *guile* imparts duplicity to the heart; *hypocrisy* (flattery) imparts duplicity to the tongue; *evil speakings* wound the character of another."

Ver. 2. **Newborn babes.**—The Greek word ἀρτιγέννητα implies the earliest stage of infancy. It was usual for Rabbinical writers thus to designate proselytes. Compare the term "neophytes." **Sincere milk.**—Simple, unadultered. *De Wette*, "The pure, rational milk." In view of the additions which had been made to the genuine Word of God by the Rabbinical schools, and its over-laying by perplexing and mischievous commentaries, St. Peter properly calls upon those beginning the new life to take nothing but the Word God as provided, and to cultivate an appetite for it. R.V. gives "The spiritual milk which is without guile," and it adds to the verse the words "unto salvation," for which there is good authority. For St. Peter's use of the word "salvation" see chap. i. 5, 9, 10.

Ver. 3. **Tasted.**—Or had a beginning of experience of personal relations with the Lord Jesus. The words are taken from Ps. xxxiv. 8, LXX. version. **Gracious.**—More precisely "usable," "serviceable." The figure in the Greek word is the mellowness of old wine.

The idea of the apostle is that if the Christians were like newborn babes the food they had tasted once they would want again.

Ver 4.—The figure is now changed, and the apostle deals with the Christian Church rather than the Christian individual. Two things were present to his mind—the material Jewish temple and the spiritual Jewish dispensation. He makes the one help to the understanding of the other. The Christian Church is like a new temple, built up from its very first foundation-stone. It is like a new dispensation, only instead of the new religious nation being represented by an order of priests, it is a kingdom of priests, represented only by one great High Priest. **To whom coming.**—In order to make a beginning in building the spiritual house. **Living stone.**—Not here natural rock, as distinguished from stone shaped by the mason; but *spiritual* foundation of a spiritual house. **Chosen of God.**—The rejection of Christ by the Jews is a historical fact: the acceptance of Christ by God is the spiritual fact implied in our Lord's resurrection. **Precious.**—Or honourable. The assumed criminality of the crucifixion deceived neither God nor good men. No matter what Christ *seemed* to be, He *was* "holy, harmless, undefiled."

Ver. 5. **Lively.**—Better, living, with the same idea as above. Men quickened with a spiritual life, therefore spiritual men; stones to match Christ, the living stone. (Perhaps the sentence should read, "Build yourselves up.") **Spiritual house.**—The Christian Church, thought of as the spiritual reproduction of the Jewish Temple. **Holy priesthood.**—In old days the true spiritual temple was the nation of devout worshippers; it was represented by the tribe (twelfth part of itself), which was wholly devoted to the Temple ministry. The Christian Church is the new spiritual temple, every member being a priest, and all together offering up spiritual sacrifices. The blending of figures is sometimes puzzling; "the priests who sacrificed in the true temple were themselves the stones of which that temple was built." R.V. has "a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood." **Spiritual sacrifices.**—No longer material sacrifices, but the spiritual things—thankfulness, love, devotion, etc.—which they represented. **By Jesus Christ.**—Who offered the model spiritual sacrifice—who offered *Himself.*

Ver. 6. **In the Scripture.**—Not precisely quoted from either Heb. or LXX. of Isa. xxviii. 16. The apostle evidently wrote from memory. **In Sion.**—The Temple was built on Moriah. **Corner-stone.**—With possible allusion to the corner of the Temple area that was built right up from the valley. But one of the stones in the foundations of ancient buildings was usually spoken of as *the* foundation-stone. **Elect.**—Better, "selected." **Precious.**—Counted honourable. **Confounded.**—The idea given by the rendering in the LXX. Building on this foundation, we build securely; do not find our confidence misplaced.

Ver. 7. **Precious.**—Still the same idea, "held in honour" or in confidence. Such is your esteem that you have no hesitation in building on this foundation. **Disobedient.**—Involving unbelief finding expression in active rebellion. **Disallowed.**—Left in the quarry as unsuitable and unworthy. **Head of the corner.**—Is put in the most honourable position.

Ver. 8. **Stone of stumbling,** etc.—See Isa. viii. 14. "Their stumbling implies the judicial punishment of their rejection of Messiah. They hurt themselves in stumbling over the corner-stone." **Appointed.**—The Jewish mind always regarded what *did* happen as what God had arranged *should* happen. No doubt the reference here is to the prophecies which had so plainly anticipated the rejection as well as the acceptance of Messiah. "Those who stumbled by disbelief were marked out by prophecy as men who would stumble." But prophecy refers to a *class,* not to *individuals.*

Ver. 9. **Chosen generation.**—These terms describe the new spiritual Israel in terms taken from the old Israel. God chose the Abrahamic race; God called out a particular priesthood. The entire nation was holy, in the sense of separated unto God. The Jews were a peculiar, or purchased, people, in view of the redemption from Egypt, which was the beginning of their national life. So the new Israel was a race chosen in Christ, constituted as a kingdom of priests, separated from the world unto God, and specially related to God as the purchase of His own sacrifice. **Out of darkness.**—Not the darkness of heathenism, but of the formal Judaism of that day.

Ver. 10. **Not a people.**—For this figure see Hos. ii. 23. The Jews are still addressed, but from this point of view—while they had disbelieved and rejected God's Son whom He had sent, they were *not* God's people. All disbelief and disobedience put them out of covenant relations. When they believed and obeyed Christ they became God's people again, and now in a new and higher sense.

Ver. 11.—This verse begins some direct counsels concerning the ordering of Christian conduct and relations. As they have a somewhat severe tone, they are commenced with an affectionate form of address—"Dearly beloved." **Strangers and pilgrims.**—Sojourners, suitable to those who belonged to the dispersion, but specially suggesting the unworldliness of the spiritual life, in Christ, which they had begun. **Fleshly lusts.**—Which lead to drunkenness, gluttony, and uncleanness. There was special need for the Hebrew Christians to be vigilant, on account of the calumnies which the heathen were beginning to circulate about

the Christians. For the "works of the flesh" see Gal. v. 19-21. **Soul.**—The higher element in man's nature. Here the new spiritual life of the soul is referred to. The antagonism between flesh and spirit is a familiar Pauline topic.

Ver. 12. **Conversation.**—Behaviour in relationships with others. **Honest.**—Better, "seemly." The word used is the ordinary Greek word for "beautiful," and it distinctly means goodness that comes into sight. A daily walk that is attractive, winsome, to *look at*. **Gentiles.**—Everybody other than yourselves. **Speak against you.**—In different ways. Both the Gentiles and the bigoted Jews aspersed the character of the Christians. We cannot stop the slanderer, but we can jealously see to it that he shall have no ground for his slandering. We may be persecuted, as Christ was; we must try to be as free from blame as Christ was (see ver. 20). **Day of visitation.**—Time of calamities which the early Christians regarded as the coming of Christ. "Not only the last great day, but on whatever occasion God brings matters to a crisis" (*Canon Mason*).

Ver. 13. **Submit yourselves.**—This belongs to the care Christians should take not to be in any sense an occasion of offence in Society (Rom. xiii. 1-7). **Ordinance of man.**—Every human institution. A spiritual life can find expression in every form of governmental and social life. **For the Lord's sake.**—Lest reproach should come on Him, through reproach coming on you. **King.**—Here an abstract word for the person in chief authority. Then an emperor.

Ver. 14.—Even an imperfect government aims to secure the general good. It is noticed that neither St. Peter nor St. Paul lay down any exceptions to the rule of complete obedience; and yet proper exceptions there must be.

Ver. 15. **With well-doing.**— Not with disputations, but with the irresistible persuasion of a holy life. **Ignorance.**—For the calumnies of Christians were spread by those who hated them without knowing anything correctly about them. The word implies a stolid and wilful ignorance.

Ver. 16. **As free.**—In regard to the ordering of personal life relations. Bound to meet all public obligations; free to shape their own life and conduct. Worldly maxims, social customs, common habits and opinions, have no binding force on Christians. In all this sphere the Christian is a "law unto himself." **Cloke of maliciousness.**—"If under the pretence that they were asserting their Christian freedom they were rude, overbearing, insolent, regardless of the conventional courtesies of life," this made the liberty a cloke of baseness.

Ver 17. **Honour.**—By showing each one the respect that is due *to him*. **Love.**—With more than the love of complacency; with the love of family. **Fear.**—The feeling which recognises a supreme claim.

Ver. 18. **Servants.**— Slaves. Many of the early Christians came from the ranks of slaves, or freedmen. And their freedom in Christ made their bondage to an earthly master specially irksome. Perhaps "the οἰκέται here addressed are domestic servants, who were more exposed to the bad temper of their masters than the servants in the field." **Froward.**—Crooked. One who is unreasonably exacting, capricious, and cross-grained.

Ver. 19. **Conscience toward God.**—Better, "consciousness of God." This essentially belongs to the new life. Conscious of God's presence as seeing, judging, helping, His servants. **Wrongfully.**—Without having given just occasion.

Ver. 20. **Buffeted.**—Cuffed with the hand, or smitten with the stick, as servants then were. **Acceptable.**—Same word as "thankworthy," in ver. 19.

Ver. 21. **Were ye called.**—Or, "this is involved in your call." **Example.**—Of patience in bearing suffering, with the inward assurance of innocence. The Greek word suggests a drawing which the student is to copy.

Ver. 24. **Bare our sins.**—See Isa. liii. 12. Our sins, not His own. The Hebrew word may mean either to carry, or to lift or raise. It is not clear which precise meaning St. Peter intends. **On the tree.**—Cross. R.V. "upon the tree"; marg. "up to the tree." **Stripes.**—Prophetic reference, Isa. liii.; historic reference, our Lord's scourging by command of Pilate.

Ver. 25. **Shepherd and bishop.**—Episcopos, guardian, protector. See Ezek. xxxiv. 11, 12. Alford thinks that the apostle transfers the well-known name of the elders of the Churches, ἐπίσκοποι, to the great Head of the Church, of whom they were all the servants and representatives.

NOTE ON VER. 19.—*Dr. R. W. Dale* translates thus: "For this is acceptable, if *through consciousness of God* a man endureth griefs, suffering wrongfully." He holds that the Greek word which Peter used has sometimes the meaning "consciousness" and sometimes that of "conscience." In this passage the former meaning is much more appropriate, and Dr. Dale uses it very effectively to prove that the knowledge or consciousness that Christians have of God becomes an effective force in the moral life. Such a knowledge is open to every Christian, for Peter here writes to *slaves* when he says, "This is acceptable if, through consciousness of God, a man endureth griefs, suffering wrongfully."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—3.

Christian Growth is in Christian Control.—In these verses the growth is seen in what it enables a man to throw off. When men became Christians out of Pagan or heathen associations, there would necessarily be a great deal of the old life and habit that must be thrown off—a great incrustation of old evils that must be resolutely dealt with. The apostle Paul recognises how much had been done in this way by his Gentile converts when he says (1 Cor. vi. 10, 11), "Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God." But St. Peter wrote his epistle mainly, if not exclusively, for Jewish converts, not for Gentile Christians. The point is, however, equally applicable to *them*. For there were characteristic moral faults of Judaism, and especially of the later, formal, and corrupt Judaism, which were quite as antagonistic to the Christian spirit, and the Christian life, as any of the open vices of Paganism could be. "Hypocrisies and evil-speakings" were characteristic Jewish sins. And they must be thrown off if the Christian life is to find free expression; they would be surely thrown off with advancing Christian growth. The point has its continuous application in every age, and to-day. More or less defined, every Christian life is a new start and a change. There has always been much in the old life which is unsuitable in the new. A man carries habits, tendencies, cherished ideas, infirmities, into the profession of faith in Christ, which he must gradually throw off if he is to "walk worthy of his vocation"; and the throwing off is not best done as a series of efforts, it is the natural result of growth in the Divine life. Grow, and the more vigorous life of the soul will surely shake off the old evils and frailties. In relation to the evils of our habits, disposition, hereditary tendencies, etc.—

I. **We can deal with the things that give them their opportunity and power.**—In that sense we can "lay them aside," "put them away." A man may not have gained power over himself so as to allow himself to be placed in circumstances of temptation; but he may have gained such a power of control over his circumstances that he can alter conditions and relations which he knows are temptations *to him*. The familiar illustration is the man who has the craving for drink. He cannot directly master that craving, but he can watch everything, and carefully avoid everything that excites it. By so doing he can wear the craving out, and presently gain the full victory, and consciousness of full strength to resist. Shaping life so that there shall be no appeals to our natural frailties in it, is the duty which is seldom recognised. And yet, in that sense, the Christian's life is in his own hands.

II. **We can suitably nourish the spiritual growth.**—"The sincere milk of the Word" is not the "milk for babes" of which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews treats. St. Peter's "sincere milk" is rational (intellectual), or more precisely *spiritual* milk; and he only calls it milk because his thoughts are occupied with the terms "begotten again," "new-born babes." He means this: Nourish yourselves into spiritual strength with just that spiritual food which is precisely adapted to your spiritual condition. It may be milk, if that is best for you; it may be strong meat, if that is best for you. The one important thing is that the Christian should *grow*; and the conditions of growth are very largely within his own control. He must meet his possibilities and responsibilities.

III. **We shall want to nourish that spiritual growth if we rightly apprehend the responsibilities of the Christian life.**—Growth is the one demand of all life—

vegetable, animal, intellectual, moral, spiritual. Wherever there seems to be life, we ask what we feel to be the testing question, "Does it grow?" Every life has an aim—it is moving toward something. It will never reach it if it does not *grow*.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 2. *Things to be Laid Aside.*—The apostle mentions five, but he includes others of like nature, and he means they are to be laid aside once for all, never to be touched, thought after, or desired again. Having been laid aside, the temptation to them must be resisted, and not one of these noxious weeds must be permitted to show its head.

I. **All malice**—or all manner of malice. Malignity, or resentment of real or fancied injuries. You think that some one has done you a wrong, and you are angry with him; you owe him a grudge, you are determined to have your revenge. This is malice (Eccles. vii. 9).

II. **All guile.**—Guile is deceit, and opposed to truth and openness of mind. A man who cherishes guile is never to be trusted, and he is so suspicious that he can seldom trust any one himself. A true Christian is sincere.

III. **Hypocrisies.**—These are allied to guile, and are indeed a species of it. Hypocrisy is acting a part as on a stage, where a person appears to be what he really is not. A hypocrite is one who deceives, and intends to do so—does it knowingly.

IV. **Envies.**—Some men see others better off, more respected, and in possession of greater honours than themselves, and they envy them, want to be like them, and are mortified if they cannot be.

V. **All evil speakings or slanderings.**—Envies lead to these, and these are the bane of all society. What heartburnings, and jealousies, and misunderstandings have arisen from the practice of evil-speaking! There are many ways of speaking evil of others. You may insinuate doubts as to their piety; you may ask questions about them which will lead others to ask questions still more significant. And it is an easy thing to blast the character of another, whilst it is a very difficult thing to repair the injury. These things the Christian is thought of as having already laid aside, and in all circles of true believers they are—and they should be—guarded against with the utmost care.—*Thornley Smith.*

Ver. 3. *Testing Conditions.*—St. Paul commends the duty of self-examination and heart-searching in connection with the Holy Sacrament in 1 Cor. xi. This verse of our text may suggest suitable preparatory self-examinations.

I. **The beginnings of a religious life.**—"Tasting that the Lord is gracious." We are very anxious to gain assurance that our *beginning* has been right. Perhaps we make too much of the *initial stages.* The New Testament describes the beginnings of religious life under a variety of forms and figures. Sometimes it is the passing in at a gate, or it is the first breath of a new life; or it is the first cry of a newborn babe; or the first prayer of a penitent soul; or the healing in response to a look; or the answer to a call; or the laying of a life foundation. Here it seems to be the infant's first taste of food—the wakening, as it were, of a new sense, which discovers that "the Lord is gracious." St. Peter's words may be read in the light of his own experience. There is one incident of unsurpassed tenderness in St. Peter's life. It is his interview with Christ after the resurrection, when, again and again, but using somewhat different terms, Christ asked the searching question, "Lovest thou Me?" That was the time, above all other times, in which St. Peter felt the graciousness of the Lord. That was not his conversion, but it was his first "soul-taste," the

scene that henceforth toned his life. By this expression St. Peter evidently means—1. A personal realisation of the graciousness of the Lord. He had been brought up in a knowledge of God that must have included His *goodness*. But such things as we may learn about God may lie on the mind as mere knowledge. St. Peter says that it must *get in* to a man, and become the man's own. The soul, with its sensitiveness and receptivities, must touch and taste. It is easy enough for us all to sing, "God is Love." It is a solemn moment when the soul wakes up to say, with a passion of personal feeling, "Yes, God *is* love." "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." 2. A heart realisation of the graciousness of the Lord. Many a man's *mind* has hold of it, but it is much more for the affections to be swayed and constrained by it, and for the graciousness to flow in on the soul like the tide of new life to one who has been sick. 3. And it is nothing less than the *graciousness of God* that is tested. That word "graciousness" must be meant to express more than goodness, more than kindness. God is good to all; kind to the unthankful and the unholy, but gracious to the penitent sinner. So "graciousness" is the sinner's "taste" of the Lord. Now, cannot a man know for himself whether, made sensitive by sin-burden, he has "tasted that the Lord is gracious."

II. **The privileges that belong to such a beginning.**—Not to any particular degree of Christian attainment, but to the very beginning. First privilege—a right to the name, and to the hope, of a Christian. Second, a right of admission to Christ's Church, which is the communion of such. Third, a right to kneel at the altar of the Lord, to sit down at the table of the Lord, which is the feast together of those who, in love, respond to love.

God's Graciousness.—This is the sweetness of the word, that it hath in it the Lord's graciousness, and gives us the knowledge of His love. This they find in it, who have spiritual life and senses, and those senses exercised to discern good and evil, and this engages a Christian's further desire of the Divine Word. They are fantastical, deluding tastes that draw men from the written Word, and make them expect other revelations. This graciousness is first conveyed to us by the Word; there first we taste it, and there still we are to seek for it; there the love of God in Christ streams forth in the several promises. The heart that cleaves to the Word of God, and delights in it, cannot but find in it, daily, new tastes of His goodness. Here it reads His love, and by that stirs up its own to Him, and so grows and loves every day more than the former, and thus is tending from tastes to fulness. It is but little we can receive here—some drops of joy, that enter into us; but there we shall enter into joy, as vessels put into a sea of happiness.—*Leighton.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 4—8.

The Spiritual House.—The figures of this paragraph are precisely adapted to those who were familiar with the associations of Judaism, and more especially with the material tabernacle and the Temple, and the outward religious system associated with them. The *material* house of Judaism is contrasted with the *spiritual* house of Christianity. It is the contrast that is so fully elaborated in the epistle to the Hebrews. That was a material house, in which earthly men fulfilled prescribed temporal duties, and carried out a ritual and ceremonial system. This is a living, spiritual house; of living, spiritual men, who offer in it living, spiritual sacrifices. And yet St. Peter recognises that there was a spiritual within that old material. The spiritual had always been revealed to the spiritually-minded. The spiritual could now be more fully apprehended, and the old material building may now fade away, or be removed, as scaffolding is

removed, when the Temple is complete. Or, using another figure, St. Peter says, the people of Israel were separated, consecrated people; the whole people were a "holy priesthood," devoted to the service of God. This fact was represented, and so kept ever before their minds, by the separation of one tribe entirely to the priestly service. St. Peter sees that truth concerning Israel carried over into Christianity, and spiritually realised. The Church wants no delegation of any portion of itself for priesthood, because spiritually every member is a priest, and the entire Church makes up the "holy priesthood." Fixing attention on the "Spiritual House," notice three things:—

I. **Its foundation.**—It is a living man—that is, a spiritual man. "Unto whom coming, a living stone." It is the spiritual, Divine man, the Lord Jesus Christ. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, even Christ Jesus." The figure of the foundation stone is doubtless taken from that corner of the Temple-area which was built up from the valley with gigantic masonry. The figure of a foundation is somewhat difficult for us to apprehend, because our buildings do not in any sense rest upon a single stone. The right thought may come to us through the schools of philosophy, systems of theology, or other religions. We speak of Socrates as the founder or foundation of the Socratic School; of Calvin as the founder or foundation of the Calvinistic system of theology; of Mohammed as the founder or foundation of the Mohammedan religion. In each case we mean that on one man's thoughts, doings, teachings, rests the house of thought or truth which has been reared. Christianity is the house of truth and life reared upon the thoughts, doings, teachings, sufferings, of the Lord Jesus; and it is a spiritual house, because the spiritual is the range of Christ. What He thought, did, felt, taught, were the spiritual things on which the spiritual house was reared.

II. **The stones of the building.**—Living men—that is, spiritual men. Living in the sense in which Christ is spoken of as living. Connect with the idea of being begotten again, born again, quickened with the new, the spiritual life. St. John is the apostle of this new life. He "conceives of religion as consisting in the immediate personal relation of the soul to God or to Christ. It begins with an impartation from God. To be born of God means to receive from Him a communication of spiritual life, whereby the soul is more and more transformed into Christ-likeness." The stones of the building must be of the same nature as the foundation. Of material stones build the old Temple, on a foundation of stone from the quarry. Of spiritual stones—men alive unto God—build the spiritual temple, on a foundation of the spiritual stone, the man alive unto God, the spiritual man Christ Jesus. But another idea is suggested by the term "lively" or "living." A living thing is a moving, acting thing, and the stones of the spiritual house are living men in their activity. It is a difficult association for us, but Eastern minds delight in involved and mixed metaphors. It may at least suggest to us that we give ourselves to Christ as living ones, "living sacrifices"—those who *serve*.

III. **The service within the building.**—"To offer up spiritual sacrifices." The building is a temple. And this is true whether we think of a single life or of the corporate Church. Within the temple of the individual life spiritual sacrifices have to be offered. Within the temple of the Church must be kept up the holy ministries. What the spiritual sacrifices are we may learn from the services of the older and material Temple. Find what was *at the heart* of the old ritual, and that, without the ritual, is the spiritual sacrifice of the new dispensation. Illustrate, from the inner significance of the primary form of sacrifice, the burnt-offering. That was the giving of a man's whole self to God, represented by the giving of an entire animal. That giving of the whole self to God is the spiritual sacrifice which we can now offer as quickened, living men.

And spiritual sacrifices include acts of praise, thanksgiving, trust; include everything that can fitly find expression for the new and spiritual life. That is the one and essential condition of acceptance. The new life must be in everything we say or do in the living temple. Formalities are of no value now, save as they are instinct with Divine life. One law applies to the whole service of the spiritual temple,—it must express the life of men who are "born of God."

Note by Dean Plumptre on the words "through Jesus Christ," ver. 5.—"In the addition of these words, we have at once the sanction for the Church's use of that form of words in connection with all her acts of prayer and praise, and the implied truth that it is only through their communion with Christ as the great High Priest, and with His sacrifice, that His people are able to share His priesthood, and offer their own spiritual sacrifices."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 5. *The Spiritual Temple.*—This passage suggests that the Tabernacle and Temple were type and symbol of the true Church of God and even of the individual believer. Here the *terms of communion* with God are set forth in the altar of burnt offering, and the laver; one signifying expiation by blood, and the other the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Place, with its three articles of furniture, the golden candelabra, the table of shew-bread, and altar of incense, typifies the *forms of communion*, as Prof. Moore of Virginia beautifully phrases it. Here we are taught first the duty of a burning and shining testimony for God; secondly, of consecrated and constantly renewed offerings; thirdly, of unceasing prayer and heart-worship. The Holiest Place, with its cherubim, mercy seat, and shekinah, may represent *heavenly and complete fellowship*, in the immediate presence of the glory of God, where a redeemed and glorified humanity, reconciled to God and in perfect harmony with all created being, the Law of God perfectly enshrined in the heart, communes immediately and within the veil with Jehovah!—*Anon.*

The Worshippers and the Temple the Same.—It is obvious, then, how fit, how essential it was that there should be a temple of stone for the partial dispensation; the presence of God in Christ for the transition state, when it was yet partial, but preparing to be extended; and for this last dispensation, which was to embrace all the world, what temple would have been sufficient but a temple co-extensive and identical with the worshippers themselves? As in the true Atonement there was no victim worthy of the priest but He who combined both in His own person, so, in the true worship, there could have been no adequate temple, unless the worshippers and the temple had been the same.—*Bishop Hinds.*

The Christian Temple, or Spiritual House.—St. Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians, speaks of the Christian Church under the symbol of a temple, but he uses the word—ναὸς—nowhere else, and St. Peter never uses it at all. There can be no doubt, however, that when he wrote these words the idea was in his mind, and that he thought of the Temple of Jerusalem, in contrast with which he calls believers a spiritual house—οἶκος—of which the Lord Jesus is the foundation, or the corner-stone.

I. **The foundation of this Temple,**—1. It is Christ Himself. St. Peter was a stone laid upon the foundation-stone, as also were each of the apostles. They were the first layer of the Temple, next to the foundation; but the foundation itself is Christ and none other. He is called "the living stone"; He has life, and gives life, spiritual and eternal, to all who trust in Him. A stone is hard, cold, and rigid, but

this Stone *lives* and imparts life to every other stone of which the Church is built. 2. Its excellence is set forth by a contrast—"rejected, indeed, of men, but chosen of God and honoured." St. Peter had said, before the Sanhedrin, "This is the Stone set at nought by you builders" (Acts iv. 11). Christ is still rejected of men. The sceptic rejects Him. The rationalist rejects Him. The worldling rejects Him. God honours Him. Believers count Him "precious," "honourable." 3. The results of its being laid. "Unto you, therefore, which believe in the honour of belonging to the Stone, and of being united to the building of which it is the foundation." Such is the import of ver. 7.

II. **Look at the superstructure.**—"Ye also as living (ζῶντες) stones are built up a spiritual house." 1. The materials are living stones. Such are Christian believers. Drawn out of nature's quarry, they are cut and polished by the Spirit of the living God, and are then prepared for the place they are to occupy in the temple of the Lord of hosts. Of such materials must God's house be built. 2. Composed of such materials, this temple is called a spiritual house. God has had three temples on earth—the temple of stone, the temple of Christ's body, and the living temple of the Church. The first was destroyed and swept away; the second was removed, and is now in heaven, the third remains; and will continue to grow until the top-stone be brought forth with shoutings—"Grace unto it!" In the temple of stone the shekinah dwelt; in the temple of Christ's body dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead; in the temple of the Church the Spirit dwells, filling all its courts with the light and glory of the Lord. 3. In this spiritual house there is a *holy priesthood.* Every living stone in this temple is also a consecrated priest, and has access by faith into the holiest of all by the blood of the everlasting covenant. 4. A temple implies sacrifices, and they are offered here. The sacrifices of God always were, and still are, spiritual sacrifices—the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart; the sacrifice of earnest prayer and faith; the sacrifice of a holy and devoted life.—*Thornley Smith.*

Ver. 7. "*The Preciousness.*"—The alteration made in the R.V., which reads, "For you therefore which believe is the preciousness," is less serious than at first sight it appears to be. It in no way changes the sentiment, it only alters the form in which it is expressed. It keeps in the line of the figure which the apostle is using—a characteristic figure for him who had himself been called a "stone"; the "rock-man," on whose witness for Christ the Church was to be founded. St. Peter had spoken of coming to the Lord, the Lord Christ, as unto a "living stone," that could be the foundation-stone on which to raise the temple of a holy life. He was not writing of the *first* coming of the soul to Christ, with the burden of sin—the coming for forgiveness and renewal—but of the coming of the believer when he proposes to make the endeavour to build a godly life. As Christ is the foundation of our hope, so He is the foundation of our life of character. Build a character upon nothing, and it sways with every wind, and is overthrown with the first storm. Build a character upon the self of resolve and human wisdom, and it is as the house upon the sand, which keeps fair enough under the summer rains, but is undermined and imperilled when the winter floods surge around it. Build a character upon the rock of Christ; let the foundation be His Divine claim and His model humanity, as held in the grasp of our faith; and then let life bring round what storms and floods of trial and temptation that it may, the house of character which we build may be weathered and worn, but it will not fall; it cannot be shaken. It is founded upon a rock: that rock is the "Rock of Ages." That is the "living stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious." "It is contained in

Scripture, Behold I lay in Zion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be put to shame." The Temple of Solomon is evidently present to the mind of the apostle, and suggests his figure. That Temple was built upon the living rock of Mount Moriah; but the summit of the mount was not sufficiently large or level to permit the full size and proper shape of the Temple court. On the one side the ground dipped suddenly, and to complete the form of the required area, a corner-piece had to be raised, in heavy masonry, right up from the valley to the Temple level. It was a stupendous work for the age in which it was accomplished. It came to absorb attention rather than the rock of the hill itself. It was the national pride. It seemed as if the Temple was really built on *that corner*; as if *that* were its real foundation-stone. Every believer has a temple to raise—the temple of a Christly character, the temple of a holy life. There is the natural rock of disposition and heredity on which every man builds his house of character; but the believer wants something more than this. He needs a completion of its incompleteness and insufficiency by the laying of a "chief corner-stone." That alone can make the foundation area satisfactory: that alone can be trusted to bear the full weight of the building; and that alone can give noble character to the building. And that chief corner-stone of the temple of a godly life God has provided for every man. It is Jesus the Lord, elect, precious: "the tried stone, the precious corner-stone." But St. Peter points out that, though the corner-stone foundation is actually provided, and available for all, it must be individually accepted and individually used. And so it becomes the *test* of every professor. Where there is no actual, practical faith, giving tone to the daily endeavour to live the godly life, that corner-stone is neglected; it may even be "a stone of stumbling and rock of offence." But where there is practical, living faith, there the stone is valued, held honourable; the grace of its provision is recognised, its uses are understood, and the life of holiness is so raised upon it that every part of the life feels the strength and support of that foundation. It is the interest which the man of faith has in the chief corner-stone, on which he wants to build every part of his spiritual house, which St. Peter suggests to us in this passage. And it does not matter whether we keep to the figure of the *stone*—an impersonal thing—and say, "Unto you therefore which believe is the preciousness"; or, seeing who it is that is meant by the stone—the personal, living Lord Jesus, our Saviour and Sanctifier—say, "Unto you that believe, *He* is precious." As we may, however, gain a little freshness in the form and setting of very familiar truth thereby, we will take advantage of the impersonal figure preserved for us by the R.V., and let our text mean—

I. **By the believer the preciousness is discerned.**—It will not be possible to deal wisely with this or the other points to be brought before us unless we first understand clearly who is meant by the "believer." It cannot be too often asserted that the epistles are not written to unconverted persons as persuasions to a saving belief. However unworthy of the Christian name those addressed in the epistles may be, the assumption is that they do all bear the Christian name; they have all accepted Christ as their Saviour and Lord; they are all believers. The distinction is not sufficiently recognised between the *act* of faith and the *life* of faith. The act of faith is the beginning of a life of faith, and it has no effective value unless it is followed up by such a daily faith. The apostle expresses the belief in which we are just now interested when he says, "The life that I live in the flesh is a life of faith on the Son of God." The act of faith ought to establish an attitude of faith, and that attitude should be a permanent attitude. It is by that daily and per-

manent attitude of our souls that the preciousness of Christ is discerned. To use the figure of the photographer, we may say that the act of faith renders the whole plate of the soul sensitive to particular things, sensitive to spiritual things; and they make their due impressions according as, day by day, their sensitiveness is maintained. There is a school of thought which exaggerates the importance of the *act* of faith. Salvation is regarded as the Divine response to that act; and a daily renewal of the act is required only as keeping up the daily right to the salvation. But our salvation is a much larger thing than the setting us in a new relation with God; it includes getting that relation rightly toned. And what we need to see so much more clearly, and to feel so much more adequately, is that our daily believing is a power of discernment, and a power of receptivity, and a secret of growth and sanctifying. Constantly, therefore, must believers be urged to believe. It may even be pressed upon us that the maintenance of the attitude of trust is the condition of all joy, and of all growth in the Divine life. It is not of chief importance to ask, "Have you believed unto the salvation of your soul?" It is most important, and it is most searching, to ask, Are you believing unto the sanctification of your whole life and relationships? To that life of faith the mystery of Christ is revealed: by that permanent daily mood of belief, of living trustfulness, the preciousness of Christ is *discerned.* In the Song of Solomon the lover is taunted with the words, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" He is all the more *to her* by what her love discerns in him; and Christ is all the more to us by what our faith—our trust, which is simply our faith with love in it—can discern in Him. Here is the figure of Christ presented in the gospels; here is the estimate of Christ formed by His apostles; here are the accumulated sentiments concerning Christ of saintly souls through all the ages. And yet, do most men, with all this help, discern the preciousness of Christ? They admire Him, it may be; they write about Him, it may be; they wrangle over Him, it may be; but they cannot discern His sweet secret. That comes only to the man of faith; that is the discovery of the trustful soul. It is "hid from the wise and prudent," who think they *know*; it is "revealed unto babes," who can only *trust.* Is it not a simple fact that those who are living lives of faith do see in Christ more, and more precious things, than any one else can see? It is no wonder at all that men should accuse us of extravagance when we speak of our Divine Lord. They cannot see in Him what we see, and they never will while they keep in their present conditions. To us He is "the chiefest among ten thousand," the "altogether lovely." The older prophet shows the difference that a true discernment can make in Messiah and in His mission. "We did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But He *was* wounded for our transgressions." This daily faith is the quickening of new powers, and that will partly explain our keener and fuller discernment. There are spiritual powers. They lie dormant until faith quickens them. The man who believes in Jesus finds himself possessed of unexpected powers; and what is so remarkable about the new powers is that they are ever enabling him to discern more and more of the preciousness of Jesus. And the daily life of faith is ever training and culturing those new powers to a higher efficiency. Keep up the daily soul trust, and the spiritual eyes will be ever gaining quicker, keener vision; the spiritual ears will be ever gaining subtler sensitiveness to every sound of the Divine voice; and the spiritual hands will be ever gaining firmness to grasp the duties which are set before us by the Divine will. And what is it that the cultured powers will discern in Christ? What of His preciousness does stand out clear to those who live

the life of faith? The answer can but be a series of hints. They see Jesus Himself, but Jesus in all His varying moods, graciously adapted to all their moods. Always in direct and helpful relations to them. Just the Jesus they need when the sunshine is all about them, and seems to have got into their souls. Just the Jesus they need when the clouds hang low over them, earth toil seems hard, and heaven "far to go." Yes, that is the preciousness of Jesus which the man of faith discerns. His real and abiding presence, involving His relativity to all our changing need: Jesus, vestured as no worldly eye ever beheld Him, practically helpful in every endeavour of our godly life. There is a certain Eastern character in the figure of the text that makes it sound somewhat strange to us, but we can catch the idea it suggests. Let the stones, quick with a living faith, be put on the living stone, the corner foundation-stone, and there surely will be the thrill of life into life. The Living Stone will, as it were, bind and keep all the stones, and there will be the Life ever present in every stone, keeping in place all the spiritual house. Unto you that believe there is that preciousness of discernment. You can see how much He is to you who is your Living Stone, your sure foundation. But keep near to heart and thought, that the power of discernment must always depend on the believing, on the life of faith. Here, as in so many things, the law holds good, "According to your faith it shall be unto you."

II. **By the believer the preciousness is enjoyed.**—We only derive pleasure from things that answer to us, things with which we have affinity. And so the things that give pleasure to men are manifold, and vary from the trifling to the sublime. A diamond is no more precious to a child than any prettily coloured stone, or shining bit of stone. Only when trained to appreciate it can the precious stone be enjoyed. As we are cultured, as mental faculties, and moral sentiments, and religious interests, are developed, directed, and enlarged, we find our pleasure in ever higher, and nobler, and purer things. The merely material ceases to satisfy us, the moral and the spiritual prove able to provide ever-increasing enjoyment. We begin with pleasure in things, we advance to pleasure in truth, and in character; we attain our apprehension of the very highest pleasure when we find our joy in God. Christ is no personal interest, no source of ever-satisfying pleasure, to the great mass of men. When they see Him there is "no beauty that they should desire Him." Why is this? He is what He is, but what He is is nothing to them. It is that they do not believe; the soul's power of trust has never been awakened; the great gratitude of the sinful soul to its all-sufficient Saviour has not awakened the eyes to discern the transcendent loveliness of that Saviour. Only those who are living the life of faith can ever enjoy His preciousness. Everything depends on the mood of the mind. And it is singular to notice how the joy of the soul in Christ goes up and down with the varying moods of its faith. Cannot we make this a test of our spiritual state?—"Unto you that believe He is precious." Do not ask, Are you full of admirations of Christ? Can you recognise His Divine fitness as the Saviour of the world? Be more searching than that. Ask yourself, Am I personally enjoying Christ? Does He fully satisfy me? In the love of Him do I find my soul's rest? Is the "dearest spot on earth to me" that where I meet with Him? When I think of the beautiful does He seem to me more beautiful still? When I yearn for happiness do I find myself running right in to the shadow of His all-comforting love? Is He, indeed and in truth, my joy and my crown? Can I walk earth's highway with a song in my soul—His song, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love"? And do I turn from all the glory and bliss of heavenly scenes to fix all eye and heart on Him that sitteth

on the throne, the "Lamb as it had been slain?" Then surely by us the preciousness of Jesus is enjoyed; and it must be that, in some measure at least, we are living that life of faith. Is there any test of Christian standing better—more searching and more satisfying—than this? "What think ye of Christ?" Nay, rather, What is Christ to you? How do you feel towards Him? For "unto you that believe is the preciousness." Our cherished sentiments concerning Christ keep pace with the daily faith that brings Him ever into the field of our soul-vision and our touch.

III. **By the believer the preciousness is responded to.**—It is not that he only sees it; it is not that he only enjoys it; it is that he *meets* it, he answers to it. It becomes the holiest of forces moving him, the sweetest of constraints upon him. It presses him to all loving obediences, to all loyal services, to the constant endeavour to attain the likeness of the beloved one, and to a life of virtues and sweet charities as the only life well-pleasing to Him. The Christian life has its sentiments, and nourishes them; but the sentiments are impulses and inspirations; they are active powers; they give tone to conduct; they help the holy living. Let faith glorify Christ, and keep Him ever near, the object of unceasing admirations, the source of undying satisfactions, and then the soul will surely have its perpetual prayer, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" And the life will be one prolonged endeavour to do what the loved one would have done. We know in our every-day relations what a sweet and powerful constraint the enjoyment of our loved ones is. Who among us is not a better man or woman day by day because the preciousness of our loved ones is so fully discerned and enjoyed. Life for us is the sweet response we make to those whom we fully trust, whom we deeply love, whose fellowship we so much enjoy. And yet in the earthly spheres we are only learning Divine things. Away even from the earthly spheres and relations we soar into the regions of the spiritual. There, with the power of our faith—our trust, which is faith with love in it—we discern the preciousness of Jesus, our tried corner-stone, our sure foundation. There we feel the sweet fascination of Jesus, and enjoy the fellowship and all-embracing love, and find it heaven begun to sit at His dear feet. There we feel ourselves caught and held in His restraints, bound by love-cords to His service, and perfectly willing, gladly willing, to be just what He would have us be, go just where He would have us go, and do just what He would have us do.

Ver. 7. *Our Honour in Christ.*—"Unto you therefore, the believers, belongs the honour." So said in reference to His being called "a stone elect, honoured," taken in conjunction with "shall not be ashamed." Both the Hebrew and the Greek word rendered "precious" may, with equal propriety, be translated "honoured," and this contrasts better with the "shame" just spoken of. Thus Dr. Lightfoot takes it. The argument is this: "God has selected Jesus for special honour, and has promised that all who trust in Him, instead of scorning Him like the Jewish rulers, shall have no cause to blush. Now, *you do* trust in Him, therefore to you belongs the promise, and the honour bestowed by God on Him reflects on you. You, like Him, are made parts of the Divine imperishable architecture. — *Ellicott's Commentary.*

Christ a Precious Saviour.

I. **To whom is He precious?** To them that believe.

II. **Why is He precious to believers?** 1. Because recognised as the medium of all earthly blessings; and 2. As the source of all spiritual blessings.

III. **When is He thus precious?** 1. In certain frames of mind, as when the soul hungers after righteous-

ness. 2. In certain duties, as in secret prayer, worship, etc. 3. In certain seasons, as times of danger, bereavement, sickness, trial.—*J. M. Sherwood.*

Christ All in All.—Christ is all in all to His people. He is all their strength, wisdom, and righteousness. They are but the clouds irradiated by the sun, and bathed in its brightness. He is the light which flames in their grey-mist and turns it to a glory. They are but the belt and cranks and wheels: He is the power. They are but the channel, muddy and dry; He is the flashing life which fills it and makes it a joy. They are the body, He is the soul, dwelling in every part to save it from corruption, and give movement and warmth.

"Thou art the organ, whose full breath is thunder;
I am the keys beneath Thy fingers pressed."

—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

The Christ of Experience.—This is one of the undertones of Scripture, heard in all the pauses of its history or its argument. It is a recognition of the practical religious value of the Christ, of what He is to those who have put Him to experimental tests. Such recognitions make the New Testament the religious book of men's practical life. Peter was a man far less profound and intentional than John, more realistic, more under the power of externalism and of mere ethics. He moves upon a lower plane of spiritual conception and Christian life. And yet how the fervency of his heart of religious love breaks forth! Here he is, setting forth the great value of Christianity as a source of strength and comfort and hope in the trials of human life. A stricter rendering of the text would be, "Unto you who believe is the honour." So far from making you ashamed, trust in Him will be your highest honour; for through your trust in Him you will attain to all that constitutes the salvation of a man, the noblest life here, and everlasting glory hereafter. What is the estimate of Christ which they form who have tried Him? who have submitted their minds to His ideas, their hearts to His claims, their lives to His control? "He is precious." The fundamental idea is value. In the commercial sense of the term, a precious thing is a priceful thing, a thing which fetches a price. Three things constitute value: 1. Rarity. 2. Beauty; 3. Serviceableness. All the qualities that constitute preciousness are in Christ, in a degree of excellence that imagination cannot overcolour, that even love cannot exaggerate. In respect of serviceableness, of personal beneficial relations to men, as their Redeemer from sin, His preciousness transcends all our words or thoughts. This is the form of the apostle's thought. He speaks of the experimental value of the Christ—His preciousness to those who have practically come to Him as the living foundation stone; through whose vitalising properties they have been quickened into living stones of the spiritual Christian temple. 1. We might apply a comparative test, and put the preciousness of Christ into comparison with all other possessions of our human life. Or we might subject Him to a comparison with other good men. 2. Our estimates are largely influenced by the judgments of others. Think, then, of the estimates put upon Christ's character and work by other moral beings. It is significant of His excellence that He attracts the most readily, and attaches the most profoundly, the holiest and noblest natures? Christ is never rejected because His moral teaching is false, His moral character defective, His moral inspirations corrupting. 3. The conclusive appeal is, however, to the conscious experience of our own religious souls. In personal experience we find our chief grounds for a high estimate of Christ.

I. Christ is precious when we grope and stumble at the mystery of God.

II. Christ is precious when the sense of sin is quickened within us.—When we awaken to the grave culpability of its guilt, when we realise its essential antagonism to the Divine holiness.

III. Christ is precious in our struggle with practical evils.—As we fight with lusts, resist temptation, overcome worldliness, subdue selfishness, or mourn over failures and falls.

IV. Christ is precious to us in times of great sorrow.

V. Christ is precious in our own mortal conflict.—It is not a question of notions or beliefs about Christ, but of living experience of Him, practical appropriation of the grace that He brings, practical quickening by the life that He is.—*H. Allon, D.D.*

The Verse a Quotation.—The words of this passage are quoted directly from the LXX., and properly represent the Hebrew. Almost all the best modern critics consider the psalm from which this verse is cited to be a late psalm, written subsequent to the return from Babylon, in which case it is most probable that the composer was directly thinking of the prophecy of Isaiah above quoted. The Messianic interpretation of the psalm would be no novelty to the Hebrews who received this epistle (see Matt. xxi. 9), though probably they had not perceived it in its fulness.—*A. J. M.*

A Christian Test.—One of the testing passages, which help us to gain assurance of our Christian standing. Uncertainty about our personal religious condition may be neither right nor necessary, but it is felt by all Christians at times. Two other tests may be suggested. 1. Tenderness of conscience about sin. 2. Manifest difference in the things we now love and choose. In the text we have.—

I. A description of the Christian.—"You that believe." That fits precisely into apostolic preaching. In Acts we find St. Peter calling upon men to *believe* in Christ as Messiah, proved to be by His resurrection. Belief is more than, other than, knowledge, and indicates the Spirit's power. Christians are they who in the teaching of the Spirit have come to believe, with a soul-reliance on Christ.

II. A test of the Christian.—"He is precious." The word is "honour," "preciousness." 1. Christ is *honoured.* Occupies the highest place of respect; the Divine place of worship. He who can speak lightly of Christ is no Christian. 2. Christ is *valued.* Precious, in the sense of costly. Involving a right estimate (1) of Christ's person; (2) of Christ's work. 3. Christ is *loved.* Those are precious to us whom we love. We love to think of His salvation, to realise His presence, and to do His will. In this way the testing of our spiritual condition is put in its most gentle, persuasive, and attractive forms.

Ver. 8. *Appointed unto Stumbling.*—When St. Peter says that these unhappy Jews were appointed to stumble, he primarily means that the clear prophecies of the Old Testament which he has quoted marked them for such a destiny. It was no unforeseen, accidental consequence of the gospel. It had never been expected that all who heard the gospel would accept it. Those who stumbled by disbelief were marked out in prophecy as men who would stumble. Still, in fairness, we must not shirk the further question which undoubtedly comes in at this point. It cannot be denied, that, in a certain sense, it was God Himself who appointed them to stumble. There is no reference to condition *after death.* God does put men sometimes into positions, where, during this life, they almost inevitably reject the truth. These things remain unexplained, for the trial of faith.—*Ellicott's Commentary.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 9—10.

Christian Jews are the True Jews.—These verses may at first sight seem to describe the dignities and privileges of the Jews as the elect nation. But any such praise of the Jews would be quite out of harmony with the truth St. Peter is presenting. His whole argument is that we have something now far better than old Judaism; something so much better that, for the sake of it, we may cheerfully give up the old. St. Peter is writing to Christian Jews, whom he regards now as the true Israel; he would not suddenly turn aside to praise those who clung to the older system. The figures of speech are taken from the older associations, and, however difficult the work may be to us, we must fit them to the new spiritual nation made up of *Christian* Jews. St. Peter even suggests that, before accepting Christ as Messiah and Saviour, these Christian Jews were "not a people"; by accepting Him, and by virtue of the new life in Him, they had become the true, elect race. They "now are the people of God." They "had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." "The glories that attach to the company of believers in Christ are brought before us in a mosaic of Old Testament phraseology." For "chosen generation," see Isa. xliii. 20. For "royal priesthood," Exod. xix. 6, LXX. For "peculiar people," compare Deut. vii. 6; Isa. xliii. 21; Mal. iii. 17. The words would be better rendered, "a people of purchase." The "praises" of ver. 9 would be better rendered, "excellences," "attributes," "distinguishing qualities."

I. **The Divine election is always to responsibility and service.**—It is the Divine method, illustrated in every nation and in every department of life, to secure the advancement of moral beings by setting forth elect men. What we have in the Bible is simply the Divine election relative to the world's *religion*. It is most helpful to the understanding of election, thus to recognise it as an ever-working Divine method. God always has had His elect nations; He has had, and has, His elect individuals in the spheres of government, science, art, poetry, literature, family life, priesthoods, ministries, etc. The election is always, and essentially, a special call to *service*, and it always involves the previous endowment of the man, by God, with the particular gifts which He will need for the service. The Jewish race had been called out by God for a particular service in relation to humanity, and for that service they were endowed with an extraordinary *sense of God*; that marks the Jewish off from every other human race. They were to keep, as living truths for humanity, the unity and spirituality of God, and they were to preserve the oracles which recorded the revelations of that one spiritual being. That was their service, and in rendering that service lay their responsibility. The Christian Jews are bidden to think of themselves as an elect race, called to this service for humanity, to show forth the excellences and the grace of God, as manifested in the person, and in the redemptive work, of His Son Jesus Christ. In Christ God had called them "out of darkness into marvellous light." Their service was to show Him forth by life and by lip. It is the calling and election of every Christian now.

II. **The Divine election always carries with it dignity and privilege.**—The mistake is often made of putting the privilege of Divine election before the responsibility; and this tends, in frail men, to nourish a perilous self-satisfaction. Men come to think of themselves as the "favourites" of heaven, to the disadvantage of others. And on this idea of election *privilege*, sects are formed which isolate themselves from the whole community of Christians. It is dignity to be called to Divine service, but we had better think more about the service than the dignity. It is privilege to receive a sacred trust, but it is healthier for us to

think about the trust than about the privilege. We may cheer our souls sometimes with the thought of our privilege, but we should inspire our souls always with the thought of our trust.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 9. *A Chosen Generation.*—The greatness of the Christian privilege is a chief reason for our failing worthily to realise it. And we do not feel the claims and responsibilities aright when we are not duly impressed by the privilege. In this text we have—

I. **Christian privilege.**—"A chosen generation." There is reference to Abraham and Israel. Chosen in Divine sovereignty, and also in Divine love. This suggests duty as last clause of verse.

II. **Christian dignity.**—"Royal Priesthood." Reference to Israel as a nation. Union of two highest dignities, King and Priest, in Melchizedek. Explain the kingly sphere. Wherever God reigns—self or world, there the renewed man reigns as God's vicegerent. Explain the priestly sphere. The renewed man is to be his own offerer. What have we to offer? "Sacrifice of praise." "Ourselves as living sacrifices." This involves duty.

III. **Christian quality.**—"Holy nation." Holiness is the profession of every Christian. Holiness is the expectation concerning every Christian. Holiness is first an internal quality, and then an external manifestation.

IV. **Christian peculiarity.**—"A peculiar people." Not meaning an *odd* people, but a separated, an appropriated people. A people having a definite set of characteristics. Peculiar as a family of one type of countenance, and one disposition. Peculiar as having a special idea and aim in life. Here, also, duty comes in. The better we know the privileges which Divine grace has bestowed upon us, and does bestow, the better shall we feel the claims which Divine grace makes upon us, and the more disposed shall we be to respond to them.

Interest in Ancestry.—It is counted a matter of great moment unto noble families, if but for honour's sake, to know their descent from houses more ancient and sovereign; that they have sprung from such and such marriages, and conjunctions of sovereign princes, although they be in alliance very far removed from them. So is this here to us; the saints are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood," as Peter speaks, the royalest family heaven or earth affords, and that in respect of the descent thereof.—*Dr. T. Goodwin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 11, 12.

The Persuasive Power of Moral Goodness.—St. Peter urges these Christian Jews to live out fully their Christian life, to "walk worthy of their vocation"—they would find *that* give them their best influence, their best power of ministry. Men must heed when they see "what almighty grace can do." Living out fully the Christian life involves two distinct, but closely related, things.

I. **Self-management.**—"Abstain from fleshly lusts." The Christian's first and greatest difficulty is with himself. He has bodily passions which men around him are in no sense holding in control, and to which he has given power because once he did not hold them in control. When a man becomes a Christian he virtually pledges himself that henceforth he will "hold the vessel of his body in sanctification and honour." But fulfilling that pledge he finds to be most serious and anxious work. Sins of the flesh, of sensual indulgence, are usually thought of as Pagan, Gentile sins, they are the sins of humanity. And no forms

of sin so directly, or so ruinously, affect the spiritual life. They "war against the soul." "The lusts are on *active service*, engaged in a definite campaign against the immortal part of the man."

II. **Ordered conduct and relations.**—"Having your behaviour seemly among the Gentiles." The R.V. gives "seemly," but the good old suggestive word "honest" might wisely have been retained. Honest includes simple, sincere, straightforward—even good-looking, commendable, persuasive. The honest man is a power wherever he goes. The type is found in Nathanael: "An Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." The ancient philosopher was told that a certain man was slandering him. "Never mind," he replied; "I will live so that no one will believe him." We have always at our command the all-conquering power that lies in an honest and good life. That always does, sooner or later, "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 12. *Christians called Evil-doers.*—St. Peter asserts distinctly that calumnies were really rife about some particulars of the Christian morality, at the time that this letter was written. It is a mark of a late date, for at first the Christians had not attracted sufficient notice, as a body, to be talked of, either in praise or blame. The heathen at first regarded them as merely a Jewish sect (Acts xviii. 15, xxv. 18-20), and as such they received a contemptuous toleration. The first State recognition of Christianity as a separate religion, with a characteristic of its own, was the Persecution of Nero, A.D. 64. Now it so happens that we have almost contemporary heathen documents which bring out the force of this passage. Suetonius, in his life of Nero (chap. xvi.), calls the Christians by the very name St. Peter uses: "the Christians, a kind of men of a new and malefic superstition." Only about forty years later, we have Pliny's famous letter to Trajan, written actually from the country in which St. Peter's correspondents lived, and referring to some of the very persons (probably) who received the epistle, as having apostatised at the time of the persecution under Nero; in which letter Pliny asks whether it is the profession of being a Christian which is itself to be punished, or "the crimes which attach to that profession." The Apologists of the second century are full of refutations of the lies current about the immorality of the Christian assemblies. The Christians were a secret society, and held their meetings before daylight; and the heathen, partly from natural suspicion, partly from consciousness of what passed in their own secret religious festivals, imagined all kinds of horrors in connection with the Christian mysteries. From what transpired about the Lord's Supper, they believed that the Christians used to kill children, and drink their blood, and eat their flesh. Here, however, the context points to a different scandal. They are warned against the *fleshly lusts*, in order that the heathen may find that the Christians' great glory lies in the very point wherein they are slandered. "Evil-doers," therefore, must mean chiefly offences on that score. It is historically certain that such charges against Christian purity were common. Even as late as the persecution under Maximin II., in the year 312, it was reported that these meetings before light were a school of the vilest arts.—*A. J. Mason, M.A.*

Charges against Christians.—The words indicate the growth of a widespread feeling of dislike, showing itself in calumny. The chief charge at this time was probably that of "turning the world upside down," *i.e.* of revolutionary tendencies, and this view is confirmed by the stress laid on obedience to all constituted authority in the next verse. With this were

probably connected, as the sequel shows, the accusations of introducing discord into families, setting slaves against their masters, wives against their husbands, etc. The more monstrous calumnies of worshipping an ass's head, of Thyesteian banquets of human flesh, and orgies of foulest licence, were probably of later date.—*Dean Plumptre.*

Vers. 11, 12. *Strangers and Pilgrims.*—*Archbishop Leighton* paraphrases these verses thus: "If you were citizens of this world, then you might drive the same trade with the men of this world, and follow the same lusts; but seeing you are chosen and called out of this world, and invested into a new society, made free of another city, and are therefore here but travellers, passing through to your own country, it is very reasonable that there be this difference between you and the world, that while they live at home, your carriage be such as befits strangers, not glutting yourselves with their pleasures, nor surfeiting upon their delicious fruits, as some unwary travellers do abroad; but as wise strangers, living warily and soberly, and still minding most of all your journey homewards, suspecting dangers and snares in your way, and so walking with a holy fear, as the Hebrew word for a stranger imports."

Ver. 12. *The Church in Relation to the World.*—The relation in which Christians stand to those who are not Christians is of vital importance to understand and feel. The references to this are numerous and emphatic:—"I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me" (Ps. xxxix. 1). "Also I said, It is not good that ye do; ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?" (Neh. v. 9). "In all things show thyself a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he who is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you" (Titus ii. 7, 8). These and like references inculcate the duty of conservating the Christian name and the glory of God. Such warnings would be in keeping with the Jewish faith, in which honour was fortified at any cost; but in the teachings of Jesus Christ the subject has received another and a better side—viz., that the exhibition of the Christian character should be perfect, with a view to exert on the unconverted the best possible influence. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." In addition to the duty to "give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully," add the power which will convert reproach into praise, and make of the enemy a friend. Let this latter side of the matter have our present attention. That the Christian character should be perfect for the sake of its own beauty, is a truth worthy of prayerful solicitude at all times; but the Christian character is more than a garment to be observed—it is an influence to be imparted to others. That the name of Jesus, by which we are called, may not be dishonoured by the inconsistencies of our life, we need to lift the subject of holy living above the mere matter of duty, into that of service, wherein the glory of God will overcome the darkness of the human heart.

I. **We begin with the fact that we are watched by those who are of opposite tendencies.**—We are under daily examination. We are searched, not for the good we may have, but for the blemishes that may be found in us, because the "carnal mind is enmity against God." There are those who take a greater delight to look at an eclipse of the sun for five minutes than to enjoy its light for a lifetime. But if there were no light in the sun there could not be an eclipse. So with men of worth, the contrast between the excellent and the not excellent.

fixes the eye of envy upon them; but where excellency is, it cannot be altogether ignored. In this fact we rejoice, but our rejoicing is the more when only virtue is found. Let those who search us to discover weakness find none. Let the reflection of our virtue reveal to them their own unworthiness.

II. **Let us further consider the influence of the Christian character for the good of others.**—"Glorify God," etc. There is an error which must be removed from the minds of many to establish this remark in their minds. Too frequently it is supposed by some that because they cannot take a prominent part in gospel services, and thereby possibly become instrumental directly in the conversion of souls, their lives are comparatively unobserved and useless. Let us remove this notion. As there is not a single ray of light, or drop of water, or breath of air, which does not contribute to the vast system of light, of water, and of air, so there is not a single Christian example which does not minister in the circle of the Church, and lead to higher results. The old man, staff in hand, short step, all weathers, going by the squire's house to chapel, made an impression at last, and the squire followed. He entered, and heard a sermon which touched him; the next Sunday he waited for the old man, but in vain. He went alone, and learnt from the preacher that the old man had gone home that morn. *Men will feel the need of the change which they see in us.* The sinner knows that there is something wrong within. He may not comprehend the mischief—he may not understand his sins; but he will perceive by the change in others that he also needs a change. Where there is sin there is sorrow and unrest. There is a perfect charm in the apostle's description of the change—"the new man." (Describe a man wasting by disease, who has been cured.) The new man breathes freely to heaven the aspirations of his soul. He walks uprightly, and runs in the way of God's commandment. His arm is strong to do work. Another diseased man will see the change, and 'in all need to Jesus go.' As God has visited us to give us a new heart, so He will visit others, who have seen the change, to give them a new heart also. Conversions have been singularly blest in this respect,—"We will go with you, for we," etc. *Men will feel the need of the peace which we enjoy.* You remember the invitation, "Come unto Me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." *Men will feel the need of the prospect which cheers us.* We have a good hope through grace. I was asked, when nearing New York, if I expected any one to meet me at the landing place, and I said, "Yes." But the friend who asked said sorrowfully, "No one will meet me!" "I will come again, and take you to Myself." Seeing that such glorious issues depend on the consistency of our character that others may follow our example and be saved, we have the highest inducement to live a godly life in this present world. Let us take others with us home to glory: we may meet by the way the lame; let us help him on. See the world outside the Church! What misery and degradation! We will take the gospel to them: the Christ of the Bible shall be a living Christ before them in our lives. Holy living shall be a song that they must hear.

> "O Friend! O Brother! not in vain
> Thy life so calm and true,
> The silver dropping of the rain,
> The fall of summer dew!"
>
> —WHITTIER.

And, lastly, **The influence of the Christian life leads to the highest result.**—It may be that to-day we think so much of self that we cannot rise to the highest point of our life. The highest degree of Christian excellence is the service and glory of God. To realise this we must look beyond ourselves, and beyond those to whom we may bring salvation, and beyond any benefits faith may confer on either of them or us, to GOD. He will manifest Himself in the day of visitation, when we shall see and feel that our

life is intended to reach even to Himself. In the day of visitation all matters will be seen in their true light. The life of the Church will never be fully and rightly comprehended until that day, when God will explain it. Therefore, labour on, brethren, leaving the consequences to the light of that day, striving only to do good, and save immortal souls. — *Weekly Pulpit.*

Verses 11-17. *Our Pilgrim Life; How to Pursue It.*

I. **The threefold exhortation.**—Abstain, suffer, submit (vers. 11-16). 1. Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. These include all inordinate sensual gratifications of our physical nature. 2. Suffer. Christians living as strangers among the Gentiles in apostolic times were spoken of as evil-doers. Their characters were maligned, their motives were impugned, their conduct misrepresented in all manner of ways. They must endure such treatment as their Saviour did, with all meekness, having their behaviour, conversation (*ἀναστροφή*) good and honest. The good, patient, charitable living of the early Christians told upon their enemies. 3. Submit. The Early Christians lived under heathen governments, which, in many respects, were despotic, cruel, and unjust. But human institutions are indirectly of Divine origin, and Christians should submit to all lawful authority. Christianity helps the repeal of unjust and iniquitous laws, but it requires submissive obedience to all that is lawful.

II. **A summary of Christian duties.**—1. "Honour all men." This duty has no limits. "All men, without exception, possess a certain value, first, as the creatures of God, and secondly, as redeemed by Christ. 2. "Love the brotherhood." Such is the Christian Church—a brotherhood, a household of faith. 3. "Fear God." This is the highest principle by which men can be actuated, in all the relationships of life. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and therefore the beginning of goodness, charity, love, and holiness. 4. "Honour the king" (see ver. 13, and Prov. xxiv. 21). In virtue of his office, honour is due to him. Anarchy is a crime, loyalty is a virtue.—*Thornley Smith.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13—17.

Fitting the New Life into Old Relations.—When a man is born of God, and made conscious of a new life, with new interests, new motives, new desires, and new sympathies, he is often troubled by the difficulty of fitting his new self to the old associations. Those old associations he must keep. He cannot change his family circumstances, or his business, or his obligations, or his social conditions. He must find out how to fit his new life into them, so that it may ennoble them, and they may in no way hinder or injure it. The difficulty is seen very clearly in the case of Christians who had been heathen, and must still keep in heathen surroundings. Those heathen round them were keenly on the watch for grounds of accusation against them; quick to discern any inconsistencies. The Christians were bound to be careful not to give offence, and bring the Christian name into disrepute. In this paragraph one form of practical difficulty with which the Christians had to deal is indicated. Their new life could not fail to bring to them a sense of dignity; it might easily take a bad form, and become an assumption of superiority, which would spoil their every-day relations with men, and make them unwilling to submit to existing rule and authority. Their new life would give them a sense of freedom from all restraints, which might readily pass into resistance to, and rebellion against, the constituted authorities. Apostolic advice was specially needed under such circumstances, and St. Peter is fully in harmony with St. Paul in the advice that he gives. The particular case before St. Peter's mind is that

of Christian Jews driven from their own country and lifelong associations by persecution, and finding shelter for a time in foreign lands, where there were different systems of government, different customs, and people of different temperaments. There could not fail to be very much that grieved them, very much that tried them, and very much that provoked them. The serious question for them to answer was: How can the new life in Christ fit to these strange surroundings? How does it inspire us to think and to act? The kind of feeling which the presence of Christians in a community then excited is illustrated by the exclamation of the rabble that dragged Jason and certain of the brethren before the rulers of Thessalonica, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also" (Acts xvii. 6). There evidently was a widespread suspicion that, wherever they went, Christians became elements of disorder.

I. **Christians should loyally accept the governmental system of the country in which they dwell.**—It may be monarchical, republican, colonial, or otherwise. There are different systems of government, and there must always be differences of opinion as to which is absolutely the best, and which is relatively the best for a particular nation, at a particular time in its history. A Christian has a perfect right to his own opinion, and is free to find wise occasions on which to express it; but so far as his practical conduct and daily life are concerned, he should loyally accept existing conditions, and take care to be no disturber of the peace. A question of casuistry arises here. Is it ever lawful for a Christian to resist the law? Assuming Hampden to have been a spiritual Christian, was he justified in refusing to pay the "ship-money"? The answer may be that no rule is without exceptions; and that cases may occur in which principle is involved, and loyalty to the absolute right, which is loyalty to God, demands resistance, even at the cost of being misunderstood, and of suffering. Still, the general rule is that Christians should make *peaceable citizens*, and in so doing they help to secure that general protection from evil-doers, and security for honest trade, which are the primary duties of social government, whatever form it may take.

II. **Christians always have a power at command for the silencing of those who slander them.**—"The ignorance of foolish men" means baseless, senseless slanders. Men in positions of authority are always subject to the malign influence of the slanderer. Christians in a heathen city could not fail to attract attention by their very difference from others. Slanders start with next to nothing, and grow until shamefully wicked things can be said, all utterly baseless, but too easily believed, because men find such strange pleasure in hearing of the failure of the good. Very seldom, indeed, can a slander be followed through, fought, and conquered. But the Christian can always *live it down*. He can be calm, he can be silent, he can keep on his life of purity and charity, and that will *tell* in the long run. Slanders have no staying power; well-doing has. The good man, if he will be persistent, is sure of victory, for God is on the side of the good.

III. **Christians are free to sustain all gracious relations.**—An old divine, dealing with the saying that "a Christian is a man who may do *what he likes*," replied, "That is quite true, only a Christian is a man with a *new set of likes*." The Christian is free unto righteousness; free to do everything right, and kind, and worthy. But the Christian is not free to do wrong. He is under the strictest obligations not to do anything unworthy of the name he bears. What sort of things a Christian is free to do is indicated in ver. 17. 1. Treat every man respectfully and considerately, as he would wish them to treat him. To a Christian man, every man, no matter how poor or ignorant he may be, is to be honoured for the image of God in him. 2. Keep up all that is becoming to the family relation within the Church of God. 3. Let the cherished, reverent sense

of God put serious and careful tone on all the conduct and association of life. 4. Set good example of good manners in the social and national life. Good manners recognise what is due to persons placed in positions of trust and responsibility.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 16. *Our Freedom in Christ.*—There is not another word in human language with power to thrill human hearts like this word "liberty." The victim of revolution exclaimed, "Oh, liberty! what crimes are committed in thy name!" And we may say, "Oh, liberty! what deeds of philanthrophy and heroism have been wrought under thy inspiration!" There must be some sentiment, common to humanity, to which this word makes its appeal. It must be this: throughout humanity there is an inward consciousness of bondage under sin. Every offer of outward liberty—liberty of circumstance—is caught up by men, in the hope, more or less distinctly cherished, that its final issue will be liberty of soul. The religion of the Lord Jesus Christ has its chief end "to set at liberty them that are bruised." It proclaims "liberty to the captives."

I. **Freedom in Christ is freedom of the soul.**—Men want (1) freedom of circumstances; (2) freedom of thought; or (3) freedom to do wrong—the wrong that they wish to do. But freedom in Christ is no freedom such as these. It is the freedom *of the soul.* The sinner is the real slave. The drunkard, the worldling, the sensual, the passionate, the dishonest, the selfish, the proud, the unforgiving, the uncharitable, the unbelieving, are slaves. Christ comes, past all the fetters of human circumstance, right into the soul of man. He comes to strike off rings and chains from the wrists and anklets of the soul. This is the priceless boon. The only freedom worth having is liberty to do always the things that please God. And in that sense God has made us free in Christ Jesus. We are free to grow up into the likeness of God's dear Son; our souls are free in righteousness. The Son has made us free, and we are free indeed.

II. **Freedom in Christ is freedom by the truth.**—Falsehood binds to a practical life of sin. The root of all evil is a lie. Truth works out into goodness and righteousness; untruth always works out into unrighteousness and misery. Nothing can stand but the truth. Nobody can endure who is not true. Every opinion has some practical issue; it works toward something. If it be false and unworthy, it will surely tie the soul down to a life of indulgence and wrong-doing. If it be true and noble, it as surely leaves the soul free to fulfil, in the earthly spheres, the righteousness for which it was made. The truth ever makes free. Every lesser phase of truth, whether it be political, or social, or scientific, or moral, is a liberation of men. But it is that truth brought to light by Christ, taught by Him, and embodied in His life, which is the great liberator. It frees hand, and conscience, and heart, to know that God is the heavenly Father, and the Saviour of men by sacrifice. It frees us for seeking after righteousness to apprehend the truth, that this world is not the real world, and that a time is coming when the whole humanity shall be glorified.

III. **Freedom in Christ is freedom in the Spirit.**—"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty. That Holy Spirit works within us, in the secrets of our spiritual natures. He moulds, and restrains, and impels, and purifies, and quickens our inclination, and passion, and affection, and imagination, and intellect, and habit, plucking all the self-bondages, all the society bondages, all the sin-bondages, away. He who is quite perfectly in the sway of God the Holy Ghost—if there be

such an one among us—is free from all the enticements and allurements of evil—free to follow God fully. Distinguish between liberty and independence; between freedom and licence: and then we may readily recognise those reasonable abridgments and restraints under which Christian freedom is set. The Christian man will not only find necessary limitations of his freedom, he will also voluntarily abridge his liberty, and put himself under restraints. Cultured and sensitive conscience, in respect of right and wrong, is sure to set limitations. But Christian interest in others, positions of influence on others, and, above all, the sacrificings of Christian love and charity, lead us constantly to refuse to do what, in a strict sense, we have full liberty to do. We must take heed "lest our liberty become a stumbling-block to them that are weak."

Liberty.—A brief sketch of history suffices for indicating the power which the cry for "liberty" has universally exerted. The hope of liberty called out of Egypt a tribe of slaves, and in seeking freedom they became one of the foremost nations of the earth. Liberty rallied the down-trodden sons of Israel round the banners of a delivering Barak, or Gideon, or Jephthah. Liberty fired the nation with a magnificent heroism, and led to the casting off of a foreign yoke, in the days of Judas Maccabeus. The freedom of the holy sepulchre from the hands of the infidel flung the noblest of Europe's sons, in splendid and enthusiastic self-sacrifice, on the shores of Asia, in the time of the Crusades. Freedom from a hated tyrant's power made a handful of Swiss mountaineers mightier than an empire of soldiers, in the legendary days of William Tell. Freedom to worship God sent the Pilgrim Fathers over the then almost trackless Atlantic, seeking new lands and homes. "Liberty, equality, fraternity"—grand words—have served for a sign that should arouse nations into hideous passions of revolution. Freedom for a million English slaves woke the response of the noblest English hearts in our fathers' time. And still, if men would move the hearts of their fellows, they raise some cry of civil or religious liberty. False or true, worthy or unworthy, a host will surely follow him who offers a boon that is esteemed so priceless.

Ver. 17. *Honour.* — To "honour," as the word signifies, is to estimate the value of anything, and to proportion our regards to the ascertained value. Apply this rule to man. Estimate his value by his Creator's love, and by his Redeemer's sufferings; by his own capacity of religion, of morals, of intellectual advancements, of pleasure, of pain, by his relation to a life and to a death to come; and you will then feel that to honour a man is to respect him under these views and relations; to be anxious for his welfare; to contemplate him, not only with benevolence, but even with awe and fear, lest a prize so glorious should be lost, lest a being so capable should be wretched for ever.—*Richard Watson.*

Ver. 1. *Honour all Men.*—The royal law of Christ rests not on the crumbling basis of varying ordinances, nor on the tottering foundation of disputable traditions, but on the foundation of broad, eternal truths, on the foundation of Christ Himself. For we cannot understand either why or how we should honour all men unless we know what this meaneth: "The Word became flesh."

I. "**Honour all men.**"—There is a strange universality about the precept. All but the brutish understand the duty of giving honour where honour is due; all but the vile honour those whose lives are beautiful with the beauty of holiness, and noble with the nobleness of God. But are we to honour the mean, the base, the despicable, the depraved? Yes, we honour the majesty of their nature even in its fall. We honour the man in the men. As Michael Angelo sees in the rough block of marble the winged angel, struggling to be free; as Flaxman

walking in the slums, sees the beauties and possibilities of the "human face divine" even under the dirt and squalor of the gutter-child;—even so with pity and reverence the true Christian sees, even in the lowest, the marred work of Him who breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life.

II. **As life goes on, it is more and more our temptation to honour no man.**—All our faith in human nature sometimes seems to be shaken to its foundations. Nor can we be surprised, our human nature being what it is, if even good and great men have succumbed at times to the fatal temptation of despairing of humanity. "Most men are bad;" there is the summary of the Greek philosopher, who deliberately left it as the maxim of his wisdom.

III. **Though there is so much weight of authority and evidence to support this despairing view,** it would be fatal to us; fatal to the hope by which we are saved, and which is as a vernal breeze amid poisonous fogs; fatal to the glad enthusiasm which leaps up like a fountain amid the briny waves and corrupted currents of the world. In spite of all the facts and evidence, we would say, with a living writer: "I trust in the nobleness of human nature, in the majesty of its faculties, in the fulness of its mercy, in the joy of its love." Has it never struck you how marvellous is the fact that words so noble, so far-reaching as these—"Honour all men"—should be uttered by a poor Jew, a Galilean fisherman? Had this rule been followed, what a different world we should have seen in the past! Every great crime of governments and of nations has been a crime against the inherent rights of the human race—slavery, despotism, priestcraft, etc. "Honour all men"—their inherent dignity, the infinite possibilities of their nature, their freedom of conscience, the awful price of their redemption, their immediate accountability to God. While this honour leads us to deep reverence for all human goodness, let it inspire us also with such hope and compassion as shall feel none to be too low, too fallen, for our pity or our help. Let us see humanity in Christ, and it will be indeed transfigured with heavenly lustre.—*Archdeacon Farrar.*

The Sum of Our Duty.—These words have very briefly, and yet not obscured by briefness, but withal very plainly, the sum of our duty towards God and men; to men, both in general—*honour all men*; and in special relations, in their Christian or religious relations—*love the brotherhood*; and in a chief civil relation—*honour the king.* And our whole duty to God, comprised under the name of His *fear*, is set in the middle betwixt these, as the common spring of all duty to men, and of all due observance of it, and the sovereign rule by which it is to be regulated.—*Leighton.*

The Image of God in Man.—The fact that there are in every man traces of the image of God, after which he has been created, and infinitely undeveloped capacities which might issue in the restoration of that image to its original brightness, was in itself a reason for treating all, even the vilest and most degraded, with some measure of respect.—*Dean Plumptre.*

Honour Due to All Men.—Among the inestimable blessings of Christianity, not the least is the new sentiment with which it teaches man to look upon his fellow-beings—the new relation which it establishes between man and man. There is nothing of which men know so little as themselves. They understand incomparably more of the surrounding creation of matter, or of its laws, than of that spiritual principle to which matter was made to be the minister, and without which the outward universe would be worthless. Men have as yet no just respect for themselves, and of consequence no just respect for others. Nothing can make man a true lover of man but the discovery of something interesting and great in human nature. We must see

and feel that a human being is something important, and of immeasurable importance. To show the grounds on which the obligation to honour all men rests, I might take a minute survey of that human nature which is common to all, and set forth its claims to reverence. But there is one principle of the soul which makes all men essentially equal, which places all on a level as to means of happiness. It is the *sense of duty*, the power of discerning and doing right, the moral and religious principle, the inward monitor which speaks in the name of God. This is the great gift of God. We can conceive no greater. It is this moral power which makes all essentially equal, which annihilates all the distinctions of this world. The idea of Right is the primary and the highest revelation of God to the human mind, and all outward revelations are founded on, and addressed to it. We little understand the solemnity of the moral principle in every human mind. We think not how awful are its functions. We forget that it is the germ of immortality. There is a foundation in the human soul for the honour enjoined in the text towards all men. By Christianity this duty is enforced by new and more solemn considerations. This whole religion is a testimony to the worth of man in the sight of God, to the importance of human nature, to the infinite purposes for which we were framed. True, Christianity speaks of man as a sinner—it deals with human sin; but it does not speak of this as indissolubly bound up with the soul, as entering into the essence of human nature, but as a temporary stain, which it calls on us to wash away. It gives none of those dark views of our race which would make us shrink from it as from a nest of venomous reptiles. The very strength of his temptations is one of the indications of his greatness. The sentiment of honour or respect for human beings is essential to the Christian character. A more faithful culture of it would do much to carry forward the Church and the world. I attach to this sentiment such importance that I measure by its progress the progress of Society. The various forms in which this principle is to be exercised or manifested, may be enlarged on. Honour man from the beginning to the end of his earthly course. Honour the child: on this principle all good education rests. Honour the poor; this sentiment of respect is essential to improving the connexion between the more and less prosperous conditions of Society. Perhaps none of us have yet heard or can comprehend the tone of voice in which a man, thoroughly impressed with this sentiment, would speak to a fellow-creature. It is a language hardly known on earth. The great revelation which man now needs is a revelation of man to himself. The faith which is most wanted is a faith in what we and our fellow-beings may become; a faith in the Divine germ or principle in every soul. Happy are they who have begun to penetrate that mystery of our spiritual nature, and in whom it has awakened feelings of awe towards themselves, and of deep interest and honour towards their fellow-creatures.—*W. E. Channing, D.D.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 18—25.

The Example of Suffering.—However general may be made the applications of this paragraph, it is well to observe that its counsels, and arguments, and persuasions, are directly addressed to "slaves," and that, in their form, they are precisely adapted to such persons. The "servants" of the New Testament are not persons who offered free service upon fixed wage terms, but individuals whose personal liberty was lost, who were the property of some other man, and whose powers of body and mind—whose lives, indeed—were absolutely at their masters' command. We need not associate African, West Indian, or American slave-

horrors with the ancient slave-system, though it is true that Roman and other Pagan slaves often had the bitterest of bitter lots in other ways. The term that is here translated "servants" points to "domestic slaves"—those sustaining household relations, and occupied in household duties; and we have to think of the kinds of suffering which *they* would have to endure, more especially when they had become converts to the faith of Christ, as so many of this class had in those early days. We know enough of the difficulties which our servants have to endure now, when they are amongst ungodly and scornful fellow-servants, and in pleasure-loving, self-indulging families, to be able to imagine what burdens, and what trials, a Christian slave in an ancient Pagan family might have to bear. It was most fitting that the apostle should directly address these kindly, reassuring, and inspiring messages to them. A large proportion of the early Christian converts are known to have belonged to this class. It has been noticed that nearly all the names given in Romans xvi., and many of those of other members of the Church, are found in the *Columbaria*, or *Catacombs* of Rome, as belonging to slaves or freedmen. Conscious of a new and higher life, and of thoughts and hopes altogether transcending their human lot, these slaves could not fail to fret under their humiliating conditions; and they might easily fail to meet their daily responsibilities, and unduly repine under disabilities which now seemed to be overwhelming. Indeed, the question often came up before the regenerate slave, "Ought I to remain in this degrading servitude? Ought I not, at any cost, to strike for personal liberty?" If such an one took his question to the apostles, we know that they would have bidden him keep his place, and serve Christ, by fitting nobly into his position, and living before his fellow-servants and the family in the most attractive Christian spirit. "Let every man wherein he is called, therein abide with God" is the apostolic principle applied to the slaves of that day. But St. Peter seems to know enough of the actual lot of these slaves to take them as types of the kind of suffering which Christians were then called to endure. He is not, it should be carefully noticed, dealing here with the sufferings which come from the accidents, disasters, or calamities of life, nor with those which belong to the inroads of disease, or to bodily infirmities, or to the action of heredity. He has in mind the sufferings which come out of our *various relations with others*, and especially the sufferings which attend on our endeavour to live out our Christian principles in those relations. The force of the Christly example, which he presents, is only seen when its sphere is thus circumscribed. It is quite true that our Lord is, in a general and comprehensive sense, our example; but here St. Peter does but present Him as an example of suffering, and of precisely *such* suffering as these slaves were called to endure. If these remarks seem, at first, to unduly limit the applications of this familiar passage, it will be found, on further examination, that it opens up detailed applications, within the limitations, which give fresh point to the apostolic advice. For it will be found to-day that most of our serious sufferings come in connection with our *human relationships*. Precisely what these Christian slaves felt was the bitterness of being punished when they were innocent. And this they often were, in the anger, or the tyranny, or the malice, of their masters. They also felt the difficulty of keeping patient under peculiar aggravations, and the apparent uselessness of their most heroic efforts to serve well; for they constantly failed to alter the conditions under which they so grievously suffered. This is St. Peter's message to them: "For hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow His steps." Jeremy Taylor has a suggestive illustration of the help we may find by following the example of our Lord's sufferings. "St. Wenceslaus, the Bohemian king, one winter night, going to his devotions in a remote church, barefooted, in the snow and sharpness of unequal and pointed

ice, his servant, Redevivus, who waited upon his master's piety and endeavoured to imitate his affections, began to faint through the violence of the snow and cold, till the king commanded him to follow him, and set his feet in the same footsteps which his feet should mark for him. The servant did so, and either fancied a cure or found one, for he followed his prince, helped forward with shame and zeal to his imitation, and by the forming footsteps in the snow. In the same manner does the blessed Jesus; for, since our way is troublesome, obscure, full of objection and danger, apt to be mistaken, and to affright our industry, He commands us to mark His footsteps, to tread where His feet have stood, and not only invites us forward by the argument of His example, but He hath trodden down much of the difficulty, and made the way easier and fit for our feet."

I. **The Christly example of suffering is the example of suffering innocence.**—"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." This is precisely adapted to St. Peter's declaration to the slaves: "For this is acceptable, if for conscience toward God a man endure griefs, suffering wrongfully." St. Peter is not intending to make any general declaration here concerning the sinlessness of Jesus. He has no doctrine about it. He says, "Take any case of our Lord's suffering; take the supreme case of His suffering the death of shame;—you will always find this to be true: He never suffered for a fault; His suffering could never be thought of as punishment for wrong-doing." See what sympathy with Jesus the poor slaves would feel, when it was thus brought right home to them that their Divine Lord also "suffered wrongfully"—suffered in innocence. Even we may find how wonderfully near that brings the Lord Jesus to us. For the thing that sometimes almost overwhelmingly oppresses us is the thought of how much we had, and have, to bear in life, which has no relation whatever to our *own* wrong-doing, or even to our mistakes or negligences, and over which we have had, and can have, no sort of control. Our Lord felt the same oppressive burden. "He did no sin, . . . yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him: He hath put Him to grief." *There* is our example of suffering innocence. It may not have been straightforwardly presented to us, that suffering which is the proper recognition of wrong-doing and sin is not *Christian* suffering. It is the proper lot of moral beings—there is nothing distinctively Christian about it; and Christ offers us no example of bearing the punishment of sin in that sense. There is much good advice to be given to those who suffer for their wrong-doing. But *Christ's example* cannot be offered to them for their inspiration, since it does not in any way concern them. Keeping loyalty and obedience; walking in righteousness; preserving the "vessel of your body in sanctification and honour"; meeting nobly all your earthly obligations, nevertheless, is the fact for you that life brings round to you sufferings and distresses? White-souled with Christ are you, and is it nevertheless the fact that, along with Christ, you are misunderstood, maligned, illtreated, persecuted, turned out, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"? Then the inspiring, comforting example of Christ is precisely for *you*.

II. **The Christly example of suffering is the example of suffering patience.**—"Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again, when He suffered, threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." It will at once be seen how precisely this example fits into the persuasion and argument which St. Peter addresses to the *slaves*. "For what glory is it, if, when ye sin, and are buffeted for it, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye shall take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." And concerning precisely *this* you have the helpful example of Christ. We are led in thought to the Palace of the High Priest; to the Prætorium; to Herod's Judgment Hall; to thorn-crowned Calvary. There is scorn, accusation, smiting, mockery,

howling, scourging, taunt, and cruelty; and all this strain made it a poor, exhausted victim that at last they hung mid earth and heaven, as if He were unfit for either. And no resistance was offered by Him, no reproach was made —"a silent Man amid His foes." "Taken as a lamb to the slaughter, and like a sheep dumb before the shearers." And *there* was the sublimest triumph—moral triumph—earth has ever witnessed. There is, for slaves, or for us, the entrancing example of suffering patience. It is Christian suffering when we suffer in innocency. It is yet more truly Christian suffering when, so suffering, we suffer silently, with the heroism of a patient endurance. Buffeted for nothing, as Christ was; taking it patiently, as Christ did;—this is acceptable with God. But could any example be presented to us that could be so searching and so humbling as this is? It reveals our supreme life-failures. Just what we seem never able to do is to suffer innocently, and at the same time to suffer patiently. Oh how ready we are to proclaim our wrongs! Oh the bitter things we say of those who do us wrong! Oh the frettings and the chafings under the wrongs which seem to us so wholly undeserved! See once again how He stands, calm and silent, dressed in the mock royal robes. See how restrainedly He bears the cruel scourge. See how He submits when the nails are driven through the living flesh. He, with His holy example, shames us into the dust. We can scarcely dare to look upon His holy example and by it appraise our conduct. "When He suffered He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him who judgeth righteously." Christly suffering is suffering patiently. And that is something for us yet to win.

III. **The Christly example of suffering is the example of suffering love.**—This indeed explains how the patient bearing became possible. Christ was sustained by a cherished purpose—a purpose of love. He could so calmly endure, He could be so restrainedly patient, because His sufferings were *vicarious*. "Who His own self bare *our sins* in His own body on the tree." He so endured in the inspiration of this most loving purpose, "that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness." All was borne so well in the persuasion of service to others. We have reached at once the point of the example, and the power of the example. That suffering was borne, not for sin; not as accident, or necessity; but in the purpose of redeeming love—love to us. "For love of us He bled, for love of us He died.' Christly suffering, suffering after the pattern and example of Christ, is vicarious suffering; suffering, not because we ought; not because we must; but suffering endured because we *want to serve*—and he alone can serve and save his brother who can suffer for him. Let the slave suffer for the Master's sake. Let us see that if we follow the example *of* Christ, we present an example to others *for* Christ; and our suffering may be our bearing of sins, that those whom we love may die unto sin, and live unto righteousness. We shall never suffer well, never suffer after the Christly example, until we rise into a vicariousness of suffering like our Lord's. When we take up somebody's burden on our own hearts we can go on to our cross as calmly, as sweetly, as patiently, as Jesus went on to His. Look once again at what alone is Christian suffering—suffering after the example of Christ's sufferings. You have much to suffer as a consequence and penalty of your sin. Christ never bore any such suffering, for He "did no sin." You have much suffering to bear from circumstances altogether beyond your control—hereditary disabilities, natural calamities, social distresses, insidious diseases; and in all that natural sphere of suffering your Lord shared with you. But only because He shared with you in being a man. There is nothing specifically Christian in the suffering which belongs to the common human lot. But you have sufferings which come to you for somebody's sake; which belong to your effort to serve others; which follow upon your whole-hearted purpose to serve Christ, in His

purpose to save men. You suffer as mothers suffer for their children's sake. You suffer as deliverers suffer who rescue the imperilled from flood and fire. You suffer by bearing somebody else's woes upon your own mind and heart and life. You suffer in absolute loyalty of witness to Him who is for you the king of righteousness. You suffer as the martyr suffers rather than bring dishonour upon the "Name that is above every name." Then you know what *Christian* suffering is. You know—and you may recall to mind what you know—that the Christly suffering is suffering innocence, and suffering patience, and suffering love. It is bearing somebody's sin, or somebody's woe, or somebody's recovery, or somebody's well-being, in your own body, on some tree of agony or shame. It is this: you suffer, because you want somebody to "die unto sin, and live unto righteousness."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 19. *Suffering.*—St. Peter is writing here to one particular class of Christians—to household slaves. "Slaves," he begins, "be subject to your masters." As St. Peter thinks over his Jewish flock of converts, he remembers that multitudes of them are Christian slaves in Pagan households. He teaches that suffering is thankworthy, a gift from God, and acceptable in turn to Him, if it be accompanied by two conditions. 1. *It must be understood.* 2. *The suffering must be for conscience toward God.*—This is it which makes pain at once bearable and bracing, when the conscience of the sufferer can ask the perfect Moral Being to take note of it. Mere suffering, which a man dares not offer to God, though borne patiently through "pluck," as we term it, has no spiritual value. "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." This is the consecration prayer uttered on the cross, uttered, if in other language, wherever men suffer for conscience toward God; and by it suffering is changed into moral victory. There are two questions raised by our text.

I. **Why did not the apostles denounce slavery as an intolerable wrong?**—By advising slaves to honour and obey their owners, they seem to sanction it indirectly. Nothing can well be more antipathetic than the spirit of the gospel and the spirit of slavery. The gospel proclaims the unity of the human race, and the equality of all its members before God. But the business of the apostles lay rather with the other world than with this—with this just so far as it bore upon the other. And the exact question for them to consider was whether slavery ruined the prospects of the human soul.

II. **Does not the advice of the apostle to submit quietly to wrong destroy manliness and force of character if acted on?**—Moral strength, when at its best, is generally passive and unobtrusive. No moral strength ever approached that which was displayed on Calvary, when all that was before Him was present from the first to the mind of the Divine Victim, "who when He was reviled, reviled not again."

III. **This truth, announced by St. Peter, is always applicable in every age and country.**—Among ourselves there are many who endure grief for conscience toward God. It is no monopoly of any one class. Every rank in society has its petty tyrants. Law can do but little for these sufferers, but religion can do much, by pointing to the Crucified.—*Canon Liddon.*

Ver. 21. *The Imitableness of Christ's Character.*—Christ came to give us a religion. By a wise and beautiful ordination of Providence, he was sent to show forth His religion in Himself. Christianity is not a mere code of laws, nor an abstract system such as theologians frame. It is a living, embodied religion. It comes to us in a human

form; it offers itself to our eyes as well as ears; it breathes, it moves in our sight. It is more than precept; it is example and action. The importance of example, who does not understand? And it is impossible to place ourselves under any influence so quickening as the example of Jesus. This introduces us to the highest order of virtues. This is fitted to awaken the whole mind. Nothing has equal power to neutralise the coarse, selfish, and sensual influences amidst which we are plunged, to refine our conception of duty, and to reveal to us the perfection on which our hopes and most strenuous desires should habitually fasten. It is possible, however, so to present the greatness of Jesus as to place Him beyond the reach of our sympathy and imitation. This needs to be carefully dealt with. 1. Real greatness of character, greatness of the highest order, far from being repulsive and discouraging, is singularly accessible and imitable. Greatness of character is a communicable attribute; I should say, singularly communicable. It has nothing exclusive in its nature. I know not in history an individual so easily comprehended as Jesus Christ, for nothing is so intelligible as sincere, disinterested love. I know not any being who is so fitted to take hold on all orders of minds; and accordingly He drew after Him the unenlightened, the publican, and the sinner. It is a sad mistake, then, that Jesus Christ should be presented as too great to allow us to think of intimacy with Him, or to think of making Him our standard. 2. Though so far above us, as at once man, and other than man, Christ is still one of us, and is only an illustration of the capacities which we all possess. All minds are of one family. When we speak of higher orders of beings, of angels and archangels, we are apt to conceive of distinct kinds and races of beings, separated from us and from each other by impassable barriers. But it is not so. There is no such partition in the spiritual world as you see in the material. All minds are essentially of one origin, one nature, kindled from one Divine flame, and all are tending to one centre, one happiness. This truth mingles, unperceived, with all our worship of God, which uniformly takes for granted that He is a mind having thought, affection, and volition, like ourselves. It is also demonstrable from the consideration that Truth, the object and nutriment of mind, is one and immutable, so that the whole family of intelligent beings must have the same views, the same motives, and the same general ends. All souls are one in nature, approach one another, and have grounds and bonds of communion with one another. I am not only one of the human race; I am one of the great intellectual family of God. There is no spirit so exalted, with which I have not common thoughts and feelings. No greatness of a being separates me from him, or makes him unapproachable by me. Christ never holds Himself up as an inimitable and unapproachable being, but directly the reverse. 3. There is one attribute of mind that should particularly animate us to propose to ourselves a sublime standard, as sublime as Jesus Christ. It is the principle of growth in human nature. We were made to grow. Our faculties are germs, and given for expansion, to which nothing authorises us to set bounds. The soul bears the impress of illimitableness, in the thirst, the unquenchable thirst, which it brings with it into being, for a power, knowledge, happiness, which it never gains, and which always carry it forward into futurity. When I consider this principle or capacity of the human soul, I cannot restrain the hope which it awakens. I no longer see aught to prevent our becoming whatever was good and great in Jesus on earth.—*W. E. Channing, D.D.*

Of Patience.—In these words two things appear especially observable: a duty implied (the duty of patience), and a reason expressed, which enforceth the practice of that duty the

example of Christ). We shall, using no more preface or circumstance, first briefly, in way of explication and direction, touch the duty itself, then more largely describe and urge the example. The word patience hath, in common usage, a double meaning, taken from the respect it hath unto two sorts of objects, somewhat different. As it respecteth provocations to anger and revenge by injuries or discourtesies, it signifieth a disposition of mind to bear them with charitable meekness; as it relateth to adversities and crosses disposed to us by providence, it importeth a pious undergoing and sustaining them. That both these kinds of patience may here be understood, we may, consulting and considering the context, easily discern: that which immediately precedeth "If when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable to God" relateth to good endurance of adversity; that which presently followeth "who when He was reviled, reviled not again, when He suffered He threatened not" referreth to meek comporting with provocations: the text therefore, as it looketh backward, doth recommend the patience of adversities; as forward, the patience of contumelies. But seeing both these objects are reducible to one more general, comprising both—that is, things seeming evil to us, or offensive to our sense—we may so explicate the the duty of patience as to include them both. Patience, then, is that virtue which qualifieth us to bear all conditions and all events, by God's disposal incident to us, with such apprehensions and persuasions of mind, such dispositions and affections of heart, such external deportments and practices of life, as God requireth and good reason directeth. Its nature will, I conceive, be understood best by considering the chief acts which it produceth, and wherein especially the practice thereof consisteth. 1. A thorough persuasion that nothing befals us by fate, or chance, or the mere agency of inferior causes; but that all proceeds from the dispensation, or with the allowance, of God: quotations on this point from holy writ. 2. A firm belief that all occurrences, however adverse and cross to our desires, are consistent with the justice, wisdom, and goodness of God; so that we cannot reasonably complain of them. 3. A full satisfaction of mind, that all, even the most bitter and sad accidents, do by God's purpose tend and conduce to our good, according to those sacred aphorisms, "Happy is the man whom God correcteth," etc. 4. An entire submission and resignation of our wills to the will of God, with a suppression of all rebellious sentiments against his providence. 5. Bearing adversities calmly, cheerfully, and courageously, so as not to be discomposed with anger or grief, not to be dejected or disheartened; but to resemble in our disposition of mind the primitive saints, who were as grieved, but always rejoicing, etc. 6. A hopeful confidence in God for the removal or alleviation of our afflictions, and for His gracious aid to support them well, agreeably to Scripture rules and precepts. 7. A willingness to continue, during God's pleasure, in our afflicted state, without weariness or irksome longings for alteration, according to the wise man's advice: My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, etc. 8. A lowly frame of mind, sensible of our unworthiness and manifold defects; deeply affected with reverence towards the awful majesty of God," etc. 9. Restraining our tongues from all discontented complaints and murmurings, all profane and harsh expressions, importing displeasure or dissatisfaction in God's dealings with us, or desperation and distrust in Him. 10. Blessing and praising God (that is, declaring our hearty satisfaction in God's proceedings with us, acknowledging His wisdom, justice, and goodness therein, expressing a grateful sense thereof, as wholesome and beneficial to us), in conformity to Job, who, on the loss of all his comforts, did thus vent his mind: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." 11. Particularly in regard

to those, who, by injurious and offensive usage, do provoke us, patience importeth—(1) That we be not hastily, over-easily, not immoderately, not pertinaciously incensed with anger toward them, according to those Divine precepts and aphorisms: "Be slow to wrath." "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry, for anger resteth in the bosom of fools." "Give place to wrath" (that is, remove it). "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." "Cease from anger, let go displeasure, fret not thyself in anywise to do evil." (2) That we do not in our hearts harbour any ill will, or ill wishes, or ill designs toward them, but that we truly desire their good, and purpose to further it, as we shall have ability and occasion, according to that law (even charged on the Jews), "Thou shalt not bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;" and according to that noble command of our Saviour, "Love your enemies; pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." (3) That in effect we do not execute any revenge, or for requital do any mischief to them, either in word or deed; but for their reproaches exchange blessings (or good words and wishes), for their outrages repay benefits and good turns, according to those evangelical rules: "Do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you." "Bless them that persecute you; bless and curse not." "See that none render evil for evil." "Be pitiful, be courteous, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing." "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink." "Say not, I will do to him as he hath done to me; I will render to the man according to his work." "Say thou not, I will recompense evil, but wait on the Lord, and He shall save thee." In fine, patience doth include and produce a general meekness and kindness of affection, together with an enlarged sweetness and pleasantness in conversation and carriage toward all men; implying that how hard soever our case, how sorry or sad our condition is, we are not therefore angry with the world, because we do not thrive or flourish in it; that we are not dissatisfied or disgusted with the prosperous estate of other men; that we are not become sullen and froward toward any man, because his fortune excelleth ours, but that rather we do "rejoice with them that rejoice"; we do find complacence and delight in their good success; we borrow satisfaction and pleasure from their enjoyments.—*Dr. Isaac Barrow.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Ver. 14. *Living Stones.*—Figuratively, like plants, connected with and nourished by their roots. Stones still in the quarry are said to be living. The epithet means the firmness of that thing signified by the name of a stone, for nothing is firmer than stones growing in a quarry, as cleaving fast to a rock by the root.—*Burder.*

Seeming Life of Radiant Stones.—Of course a living stone means a human being. The figure takes its origin from the seeming life of radiant stones, whose gleams and flashes have the seeming, at times, of will and life. A man is said in the Bible to be more precious than the gold of Ophir; and of a woman it is said, "Her price is far above rubies." These were common comparisons. There is something in the glow of precious stones that peculiarly fits them to serve for such spiritual figures. There is about them a subtle light—a brilliancy—that burns without fire; that consumes nothing, and requires no supply; that for ever shines without oil; that is everliving, unwasting, unchanged by any of the natural elements. A diamond that glows in the sunlight flashes yet more beautifully in the night. No mould can get root upon it; no rust can tarnish it; no decay can waste it. The jewels that were buried two thousand years ago, if now dug up from royal and priestly tombs, would come forth as fair and fresh as they were when the proud wearer first carried them in his diadem—fit emblems by which to represent spiritual qualities, and the beauty and imperishableness of Christian virtue. And a company of holy men, resting

upon the Lord Jesus Christ, may well be compared to a palace built upon broad foundations, and sparkling to the very summit with living stones which throw back to the sun a differing flash through every hour of his rise or fall through the long day. —*H. W. Beecher.*

Stones Left Unused.—Travellers sometimes find in lonely quarries, long abandoned, or once worked by a vanished race, great blocks, squared and dressed, that seem to have been meant for palace or shrine. But there they lie, neglected and forgotten, and the building for which they were hewn has been reared without them. Beware, lest God's grand temple should be built without you, and you be left to desolation and decay.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

Ver. 10. *Marvellous Light.* — The phenomena of *light* and *vision* have for all minds surpassing interest, whether in regard to the beauty of light or its utility. The beauty is seen spread over a varied landscape, in the verdure of fields and forests, among the beds of the flower garden, in the plumage of birds, in the clouds around the rising and setting sun, in the circles of the rainbow. And the utility is such that, if a man had needed to supply his wants by groping in utter and unchangeable darkness, even if originally possessed of all knowledge now existing in the world, he would scarcely have secured his existence for one day. Eternal night would have been universal death. Light, then, while the beauteous garb of nature, is also the absolutely necessary medium of communication between living creatures and the universe around them. The rising sun is what converts the wilderness of darkness which night covered, and which, to the mind of a child not yet aware of the regularity of nature's changes, is so full of horror, into a visible and lovely paradise.—*Rev. W. Arnot.*

Vers. 13-17. *Political Morality.*—The teaching of the New Testament, as exhibited in this passage, imparts a new vitality to political economy. It forms a marvellous contrast to the ordinary teaching of Judaism —that civil obedience was not due to heathen governors except on compulsion. The Christian's devotion to Jesus Christ is to be enthusiastic. All ordinary duties are His, and this consideration is to breathe a new spirit into the discharge of them. It makes the Christian, as circumstances require it, either the faithful public servant or the hero. It may be objected that the state is put forward rather in a negative than in a positive aspect. I ask, How, under existing circumstances, could it possibly have been otherwise? It was at this period so corrupt that to have taught a devotion to it would have been inconsistent with pure public morality. One cannot conceive of a holy man being fired with an ardent patriotism for such a condition of political society as that involved in the Roman empire during the first century of our era. Enthusiastic loyalty to the Roman emperors of that period was impossible. If, on the other hand, the writers of the New Testament had given a formal precept to Christians, enforcing on them the duty of becoming political reformers, this would have at once aroused the mighty power of the empire to crush the Christian Church. As there was nothing in the existing state of society to kindle a spark of enthusiasm in the discharge of duty, the New Testament asks the Christian to discharge his duties *to the Lord Christ.*—*Row.*

Ver. 15. *Silencing the Foolish.*—To a young infidel who was scoffing at Christianity because of the misconduct of its professors, the late Dr. Mason once said, "Did you ever know an uproar to be made because an infidel went astray from the paths of morality?" The infidel admitted that he had not. "Then do you not see," said Dr. Mason, "that by expecting professors of Christianity to be holy you admit it to be a holy religion, and thus pay it the highest compliment in your power?" The infidel, of course, had no reply to make.

Ver. 17. *"Honour all Men. Love the Brotherhood."*—When we speak of the larger class, "Honour all men," it is as if we should say "all waters," comprehending those that are in the sea, in the earth, and in the air; the salt and the fresh, the pure and the impure; absolutely and universally, all waters. When we speak of the smaller class, "Love the brotherhood," it is as if we should say "all the clouds." These are waters, too; these waters were once lying in the sea, and lashing themselves into fury there, or seething, putrifying under the sun in hollows of the earth's surface; but they have been sublimed thence, they are now in their resurrection state, and all their impurity has been left behind. They are waters still, as completely and perfectly as any that have been left below. But these waters float in the upper air, far above the defilements of the earth and the tumults of the sea. Although they remain essentially of the same nature with that which stagnates on the earth, or rages in the ocean, they are sustained aloft by the soft, strong grasp of a secret, universal law. No hand is seen to hold them, yet they are held on high. As the clouds which soar in the sky to the universal mass of waters, so are the brotherhood of God's regenerated children to the whole family of man. Of mankind these brothers are in origin and nature, but they have been drawn

out and from the rest by an unseen, omnipotent law. Their nature is the same, and yet it is a new nature. They are men of flesh and blood, but they have been elevated in stature and purified in character. They are nearer God in place, and liker God in character. They are washed, and justified, and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. Besides the command, "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate," which they have heard and obeyed, the promise has been fulfilled in them, "Ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."—*Rev. William Arnot.*

Ver. 21. *In the Footsteps of Christ.*—Many seem to think that to go to Jerusalem and tread literally upon the ground He trod is following the footsteps of Christ; as if one, when showed a tree bearing delicious and wholesome and nourishing fruit, should neglect the fruit and try to feed on the leaves or bark: or as if, when he had received a package of most valuable goods, he should lay them by and make no use of them, but wear with much pride the canvas wrapper in which they were packed up.—*Archbishop Whately.*

Footsteps as a Copy.—He left His footsteps as a copy, so the word in the original imports, to be followed by us. Every step of His is a letter of this copy, and particularly in this point of suffering He wrote us a pure and perfect copy of obedience, in clear and great letters, in His own blood. His whole life is our rule; not, indeed, His miraculous works—His footsteps walking on the sea, and such like—they are not for our following; but His obedience, holiness, meekness, and humility are our copy, which we should continually study.—*Leighton.*

Looking unto Jesus.—The soldier whose officer says not "Go on," but "Come on," has tenfold the spirit for entering the battle. The mowers who mow in line have much more heart during the burden and heat of the day when their scythes sweep through the grass, keeping time to the stroke of a fellow-workman in front. Even walking along the roads ourselves, we know that we can walk better and continue longer if we be following some one that is a little way ahead. We have *One* always to look to, and we can most go out of ourselves when we look at Him.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT IN SOCIAL RELATIONS.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

THE main contention of St. Peter is that the Christian life and obligations are not intended to be, and never should be, made a disturbing force in social and family relations. Our Lord warned His disciples that Christianity would become such a disturber, by reason of the opposition which it would excite; but the disturbing force must never be in the Christian. As much as "lieth *in him*," he must "follow peace with all men." Relations to masters and rulers have already been dealt with: the apostle now applies the Christian principles to the more limited, but oftentimes more difficult, spheres and relations of the home.

Ver. 1. **In subjection.**—The apostle is not dealing in a general way with the relations in which wives should stand to husbands. That must always depend on the sentiments and customs of particular ages and nations. St. Peter is giving precise advice to certain persons who were placed in difficult circumstances, and needed apostolic direction. The wives addressed had become Christians, but, in many cases, their husbands had not. The question naturally arose: Was becoming Christian to break, or to spoil, the marriage relation? And the apostle replies, Certainly not. Keep the old relations—of subjection or of equality, whichever they might be—only take care to put the new Christian tone upon them all, and get your power out of the better doing of all marital duties. The same advice is given to husbands. The subjection required is that which, in a natural way, belongs to woman's dependent, receptive nature. It should never be thought of as a subjection of inferiority. **Without the Word.**—Direct efforts to teach and influence will often only irritate and provoke resistance. The silent persuasion of a dutiful and gracious behaviour is well-nigh irresistible. "The wife, without setting up for a preacher, ought, by the discreet charm of her piety, to be the great missionary of the faith" (*M. Renan*).

Ver. 2. **Behold.**—Keep their eyes on. **Chaste.**—In general sense pure and beautiful, but with a hint of the fear husbands would then have concerning the attendance of wives at the private Christian meetings. About this scandals were very freely raised. **Fear.**—Of being misunderstood, or of giving the faintest cause for suspicion. Perhaps there is also a hint of woman's weakness, trepidation from the apprehension of real or imaginary dangers.

Ver. 3. **Adorning.**—Characteristic adorning, as a wife possessing the new spiritual life in Christ. The limitation of the advice to Christian women needs to be constantly kept before us, or the sharp points of the counsels will be missed. **Outward adorning.**—Care for merely personal appearance. Characteristic of the worldly mind is supreme interest in appearance. A proper concern about dress and manners is quite consistent with supreme concern for the inward things of character. The terms "plaiting," "wearing," "putting on," suggest elaborate processes by which time is wasted.

Ver. 4. **Hidden man of the heart.**—As if there were a spiritual counterpart of the body, and that really called for appropriate dress and decoration. The invisible person. The inner self, which is the true self. Compare St. Paul's "inward man." **Not corruptible.**—Contrast with material things, "which moth and rust doth corrupt." **Meek.**—Not self-assertive. **Quiet.**—Self-controlled. That does not readily give way under provocation.

Ver. 5. **The holy women.**—This appeal would be specially forcible to Jewesses, who regarded Scripture women as models of womanhood, and wifehood, and motherhood. **Trusted.**—Lit. "*hoped*"; with special reference to Sarah, who hoped and waited quietly for the fulfilment of the promise made to her.

Ver. 6. **Daughters.**—Compare "children of Abraham," as those who have Abraham's faith. "Daughters of Sarah;" those who have Sarah's spirit of submission and hope. **Not afraid.**—This clearly has reference to particular conditions of the time; probably to the slanders and persecutions to which the Christians were exposed. Special efforts would be made to frighten the wives into giving up their profession. "Menaces of evil may assail the Christian wife, but let her be calm and confident, and let her pursue the pathway of obedience to the will of God, and the holy courage of Sarah will sustain her amid whatever terrors may arise."

Ver. 7. **Knowledge.**—With thought and care; trying wisely to meet all circumstances, **Giving honour.**—In the spirit of Christian meekness and gentleness, which always puts others before self. **Weaker vessel.**—This is physically true, and it puts woman upon every good man's consideration. Even the rights of the husband are qualified by Christian gentleness toward the frail and often suffering wife. **Heirs together.**—The new life and new hope putting a new tenderness into your marital relations. **Not hindered.**—Cut off, as they would be by one of them praying against the other.

Ver. 8. **Of one mind.**—One aim and purpose. This is possible when all seek the honour of Christ; impossible when each seeks his own honour. **Love as brethren.**—Or "loving the brethren." **Pitiful.**—Towards each other's frailties. "Good-hearted," "sweet-spirited." **Courteous.**—Having a considerate tone on all your intercourse. Recognising the spiritual equality which underlies all distinctions of rich and poor, master and servant. The Christian gentleman is gentle with every one.

Ver. 9. **Should inherit.**—"In order that ye might." Because we are ourselves so blessed we may well become agents in imparting blessing.

Ver. 11. **Eschew.**—Put away as offensive to him (see Ps. xxxiv. 12-16). **Ensue.**—A word not now used in this form. We now use "pursue."

Ver. 13. **Followers.**—Imitators. Better MSS. give "be zealous for."

Ver. 15. **Lord God.**—Probably better, "Lord Christ." "To sanctify Christ or God was to count His name as holy above all other names, His fear as the only fear which men ought to cherish, and therefore as the safeguard against all undue fear of men."

Ver. 17. **Suffer for well-doing.**—Notice how prominent this idea is in the epistle. There must have been some precise circumstances to which the advice bore direct relation.

Vers. 18-22. This passage is fully treated in the Homiletic Notes. Here only certain meanings of terms need be dealt with.

Ver. 18. Read "Christ also suffered," not "hath suffered." **For the unjust.**—"On behalf of," not "in the place of." **Spirit.**—Refers, not to the Holy Spirit, but to Christ's own spirit. He became alive again in a spiritual sense.

Ver. 19. For "*by* which" read "*in* which." In His spiritual, as distinct from His fleshly life. **Spirits in prison.**—Now in prison, because they were disobedient to the message of the spiritual Christ delivered by Noah. It makes no point in St. Peter's persuasion against failing from the Christian profession if we think of Christ going to preach in Hades. The disobedient antediluvians are a warning example, and the salvation of obedient Noah is an inspiring example.

Ver. 21. **Which also.**—R.V., which water of the Flood, represented in baptism. **Like figure.**—"After a true likeness." The apostolic use of Old Testament Scripture is very different to that of modern times.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1—6.

The Message of Christianity to Wives.—To understand what Christianity has done for woman, and especially for woman in marriage relations, it would be necessary to present, with much and careful elaboration, the customs and sentiments, in apostolic times, of different classes of society, in the different nations to which Christianity found entrance. It must, however, suffice to present the distinction between the Eastern and the Western modes of treating woman. In the East woman is almost everywhere an inferior being, a slave and a drudge, kept shut up in private apartments, allowed no freedom, no society, no education. The only exception given in ancient history is that of the Egyptians, whose respect for woman, and recognition of some approach to wifely equality, help to explain the steadiness and the high tone of their civilisation. The Pagans—especially of the Western world—in a way honoured woman, and the Romans secured at once nobility and stability, by cultivating the family virtues. There was indeed a sad side to the Pagan interest in woman, and it has to be kept in view when the apostolic counsels are considered. St. Peter, however, has chiefly in his mind the Jewish Christians who were living among Pagan populations, and might be badly influenced by the tone of Society, and the family customs with which they were surrounded. That woman was honoured and trusted in the Mosaic system is evident from the references and teachings of the Old Testament; and if the relations of a Jew with his wife were such as they should be, Christianity needed to do no more, and it could do no more, than put a new tone upon those relations. Indeed, Christianity needs to be understood as the power that relieves everything good of the pressure of surrounding evil, and puts a new tone and a new force into everything that is right, and wise, and worthy, and beautiful. The point which appears to be before St. Peter's mind at this time is this: Christianity, as an actual fact, has been found very seriously to disturb existing social relations. Rightly enough; necessarily enough; but still anxiously, and oftentimes as occasioning serious distress. It did actually disturb the *marriage* relations, more especially in those cases in which the wife became a Christian, and had to find fitting expression for the new Christian spirit in the old Pagan home. St. Peter presents some practical principles.

I. **Christianity does not break up home relations.**—It is a fixed apostolic principle that wherein a man is called, therein he is to abide with God; that is, whatever may be his class relation, and whatever his occupation or business (provided it is honest), when he is converted, he is to remain in it, and find expression for his new Christian life in connection with it. And this principle can be applied to wives. If they are called, being wives, they are to remain in that marital relation, whatever difficulties may gather round them, and find expression for the new Christian life in the associations of their home life. And it would not be difficult for them to do this, if they properly apprehended Christianity as a new life, sanctifying their daily life, and not a mere creed to believe, or ritual to observe, or relation to sustain. The difficulty which was felt when Christianity entered the old Pagan homes is felt to-day when Christianity enters the Hindoo home, and becomes a converting and saving power to the women of the homes. For them to be baptized would be for them to be turned out of their homes, and exposed to a life of misery and even shame. For them to remain and force Christian practices upon their households would mean constant conflict and distress for everybody. And it is necessary to see clearly that Christianity never proposes the breaking up of home relations. It would be a new spirit in the heart of a wife, and do its gracious work through the moral influence of a sanctified life. Under no conceivable circumstances is

any woman justified in breaking away from her home relations on the ground of her Christianity. Her new life must find its sphere in the old relations.

II. **Christianity perfects the harmony of the home relations.**—It does this in two ways. 1. It is the most efficient power to enable a wife to bear the disabilities and difficulties of her home life. It nourishes just those passive, gentle graces which enable her to bear, and suffer, and endure. And 2. It guides her in the moulding and training of the character of the inmates, so that efficiently, but very unconsciously, she gets them all into harmony. And in her harmonising work she has not only the power of her own cultured character and influence, she has also the Divine power, which she draws down for her help, by her soul-openness and dependence, and by her daily prayer. It must be added that her harmonising work, being moral, cannot be sudden, and is not likely to be apparent to any one. It is the ministry of a life, and it often takes a life.

III. **Christianity triumphs over the difficulties that arise in the home relations.**—We need not think of contentions. Where these are happily unknown, home life has its anxieties. The men are harassed and worried; the members are afflicted. Business cares, bodily diseases, frailties in children's characters, failure in plans for the children's well-being, all make varied difficulties. Sincere and earnest Christian feeling in the wife is the great secret of triumph in and over all such things. The ruffled find her at peace; the troubled are sure of her sympathy; the disappointed are cheered by her hopefulness. Her piety helps her to see a bright light in every cloud; her faith enables her to see God ever near, just behind the cloud.

IV. **Christianity works in homes through its power in personal character.**—"The hidden man of the heart:" "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit:" "so long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement." It may be true that the supreme power of Christianity in everybody, male and female, is its power in character; but the public activities of men seem to overshadow this truth. We see it quite clearly in woman. Her mission for Christ in the world lies mainly in that influence she can win just by *being* beautiful in character, through the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 1. *The Wife's Sphere in the Home.*—The philosophy of marriage, as our Lord unfolds it, is this: a man and a woman made one all around the circle of their being; married in heart and thought and life; joined in desires and purposes and aims; in affections and interests one. Here is the starting point for the interpretation of the wife's sphere and duty in the model home. Matthew Henry's exposition must be quoted once more: "In creating woman"—for she was a new and fresh creation, and the last thing God did create, and hence His masterpiece—"God did not take her out of the head of man to be over him, nor from his feet to be under him, but out of his side to be equal with him, from under his arm to be sheltered and protected by him, and from near his heart to walk in sympathy and helpfulness by his side." God made for Adam but one Eve, not two, nor ten. Mormonism has no authority from God. What God has joined together, let not man put asunder. The union made by ordinance of God cannot be broken by ordinance of man, save by the one exception which Jesus Christ instituted. Hence the part of the wife in the happy home is equal in position and influence to that of the husband, but not the same. Woman is not merely a copy of man—a faded, second impression from the same plate—but another creation, enlarging and enriching life. It brought new and higher elements into the circle of being, adding to life's joys and possibilities, and

making man himself more, through her. The husband and wife are the two halves of one whole, and the whole is designed by God to be greater and better than the sum of the parts. Let her, then, not assume headship, much less lordship, putting on airs as if the Millennium would come when she got her fancied rights. "The wife must see that she reverence her husband." Neither let her be fretted and chafed by an overbearing man, making her feel that she is an inferior by some jumping-jack of a husband. The Scotch have a proverb, "You may ding the devil into a wife, but you can never ding him out." The husband and wife are in a true sense one. Whatever is good for him is good for her. Whatever is due from him to her is also equally due from her to him. They move together. He owes no duty to her that she does not owe to him a counterpart. It is an even thing. What the wife requires of her husband, that let her give to him. She is married "for better or for worse"; let her resolve that it shall be for better. Matches are not made in heaven, and will be for the worse if there be no watchful, patient care to work them out on earth for heaven. It is the duty of the wife to cultivate the practical home-making, God-given gift, keeping her house bright and genial. In a churchyard in England I found this eulogy on a wife's tablet: "She always made home happy." Blessed is the home that shelters mutual love; but the ideals must be reduced to reality. Work for the husband is better than worship of him, if the buttons are not sewed on. The word "wife" means a weaver, and "lady" a loaf-giver. She can be no idle dreamer. If, before marriage, the maiden weaves cobwebs of fancy, after marriage she must weave the solid "cloth of gold." That is an ornament which adorns. She is never so amiable or beautiful as when useful. Spurgeon, a prime minister of England, says: "I have no faith in that woman who talks of grace and glory abroad and uses no soap and water at home." The wife's sphere has home for its centre, and its circumference cuts, in its curves, all that is true and beautiful and good. It is not money that makes a happy home. Rich as Vanderbilt, the wife must seek to be an intelligent mistress of the house, with a smile that brightens and a touch that beautifies. Rich or poor, she must know how to guide affairs, and strive for the tact and taste that makes homely duties handsome. "She layeth her hands to the spindle, she clotheth her husband in scarlet." In the home she may say she rules in queenly fashion: "I am sovereign by the grace of God. My home to me a kingdom is, and to all that enter this realm I will hold out the golden sceptre of blessing." Marriage, to a woman, is more than a king's coronation. The wedding ring is as much a symbol of power and influence in the home as the monarch's signet. "There is great force hidden in a sweet command." No life can be tame or limited when high aims are followed. The strength of a wife to lift up others in trouble, and hold them to worthy aims, is very great. Let the wife accept that mission cheerfully, if it be assigned to her, and work under pressure and without recognition, long and painfully, if it is called for. The reward is sure. God sees and remembers all. He that seeth in secret shall reward her openly. The pleasant home-making talent of the wife will curb bad temper and evil propensity. Thus, to suppress a moment's anger may save a week of sorrow. She will strive to preserve all amenities of dress and manner, keeping the home orderly and inviting. Carefulness and courtesy in the home are never lost. Roughness and indifference are never safe, and coarseness breeds contempt. The wise wife will continue to do those things which first won her husband's love. Treat your husband's return from business cares with a joyous and smiling welcome, and make the home bright and winsome while he stays. He will stay the longer and be back the sooner. If you

pout out, "Oh, you have come at last, have you? You care nothing for me, that is plain! I have no charm, I see, for you any longer," you are in danger of throwing away the key to his heart. Never do it. He can't be harassed in business all day and harassed by his wife at night. He will want to go out "to see a man," or to go to "the post office and just step into the club house." Peevishness and fault-finding will never do. Study to be a real help-meet to your husband, and never a drag on him—to be one meet to help such a one as he is. Contact with a noble-minded woman is good for any man. There has been a good wife, as a rule, close beside every eminent man. Seldom will a man become any greater than his wife will let him. She must strive to fit herself for his growing fortunes and to rise with him, and be a true helper in all the spheres to which he is called. That is the wife's sphere, and if she does not keep even with him she will pull him down. A wife that is her husband's help-meet, growing as he grows, is his best fortune. "Whoso findeth such a wife findeth good. He will not say, 'I *fell* in love'; he will say, 'I *rose*.'" But he will be thoughtfully tender of such a wife, and very careful to put no hindrance in her way. He will lend her every aid in family cares, that they may ascend the hill together. He is the sturdy oak, and she the ivy entwining. He will throw out his strong, protecting arms that she may reach the topmost bough in grace and beauty. Pity for the ivy that will not climb! In order to do this, there must be a life-long assimilation. When husband and wife first come together, they are alike at only a few points, and know really little about each other. They must study each other, and see the faults and virtues of each other, mutually helping and strengthening each other. So will they conform to one another, and grow more and more together, avoiding stirring up the bad in each, and developing the good. We all have our faults. Expect faults, and be not surprised at finding them. It is a great thing to kindly help one to get rid of them and beyond them. Very likely here is where the young wife will have her first cry. She has been such a darling in the home, and such a pet in society; and so long has she had her own way that when her husband gets tired of her egotism and selfishness, and brings her up with a square turn to consider that there are two to be consulted in that firm instead of one, it will overwhelm her. Hasn't her husband always said that they are one?—"Two hearts with but a single thought!" and has she not been given to think that she is the one! And now, she thinks, he is a monster, and that life is not worth the living. But she is good and true at heart, and will find her head soon, and be a wiser and better wife. She will be married to her husband, after that, at a higher point in her soul. In this way, by self-denial and forbearance, they will, step by step, become truly joined in the nobler ranges, and secure a happy marriage union.—*C. L. Goodell, D.D.*

Vers. 3, 4.—*The Higher Life for Woman.*—There are two passages, and this is one of them, from which there has been derived by the Puritan and so-called Christian teachers the doctrine that it was wicked for women to wear jewellery and precious stones. They have not been so particular about plaiting the hair, that I know of, although that comes in under condemnation in the same way. Now, the whole point is lost where it is fixed on these things. The point is, that one should not expend the whole of life on making the outside beautiful, but that one should see to it that the inside is adorned also. You are not to cheat the soul of all its gems and virtues for the sake of making yourself attractive exteriorly by adornments of that kind. That is the point, but it has been commuted into a general declaration against ornaments of beauty—whether of the hair, or of the apparel, or of precious stones. Nothing could be

farther from the spirit of the text than that. This, we are to bear in mind, is addressed in its original form to Oriental women. They were in the condition mainly that multitudes of men think they ought to be in now. They were stayers at home; they were managers of the household; they received no gifts of education whatever. It was not necessary that a woman should be expensively educated for the sake of making bread or mending stockings, and so they were but little better than slaves of the harem. Even in the very highest point of its splendour there was not in all Athens a single woman who was permitted to be educated, if she wished to have the reputation of virtue. Knowledge with women in Grecian days was a token of impudicity. If a woman meant to live as a courtesan, no pains were spared to educate her in taste, in knowledge, in philosophy, even in statesmanship. Here is the root of the explanation in regard to those dissuasions in the writings of the New Testament, that women should not speak in public. In the corrupt and degraded sentiment of those Oriental ages, for a woman to be able to speak in meeting and to rise to do it, would have fixed upon her the stigma of being common and corrupt. Therefore it was a wise decree of the apostle that, in such an age, and under such public ideas of what was feminine and pure, and what was unfeminine and impure, women must be silent. They must conform in the churches to the public sentiment of their time, until Christianity should have changed the times, and rendered possible a larger liberty, felicitous and beneficial. Now, in such a case as that of women, whose desire to please and love of pleasure is strong—not perhaps stronger than in men, but under circumstances in which there were fewer ways of pleasing than men possess—what could they do but make their persons attractive? They were forbidden to make themselves beautiful within, and so they made themselves as beautiful as they could without, with braided hair, with all manner of pearls and precious stones, with all fancifulness and beauty of dress. But St. Peter and St. Paul alike said: "Do not spend yourself on external garnishing; look inward, and cultivate the inward life," or, as St. Peter here calls it, "the hidden man of the soul." In short, St. Peter and St. Paul were both in favour of higher education for women. They did not believe that the line of her life should not rise above the bread-trough, or the handling of the instruments by which she was to obtain victory in the industries of life. They believed that a woman should have a higher life, a higher inward development; and should not therefore turn to frivolous pleasures and external beauty.—*H. Ward Beecher.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verse 7.

The Christian Husband.—The husband is the head of the wife, but not in such sense that she is to be under his feet, to be treated as his servant, or to be deemed his inferior. She is of his bone and of his flesh, and St. Paul therefore said, "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them" (Eph. v. 25; Col. iii. 19). And here St. Peter is equally express: "Likewise," or in like manner, "ye husbands, dwelling with the feminine according to knowledge, as with the weaker vessel, giving honour to those who are also fellow-inheritors of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered." Such is the true rendering of the apostle's words. What, then, is required of the husband?

1. **Consideration.**—He is to dwell with his wife according to knowledge, as with the weaker vessel. Both are vessels—clay in the hands of the Potter, Who has formed them for Himself, giving to each the frame best suited for the end He has in view (Jer. xviii. 6; Isa. xxix. 16, etc.); but the wife is physically the weaker vessel, and the husband, knowing this, is to treat her in every respect

with kind consideration. She is subject to many trials as a mother, to many cares as the mistress of the household, to many diseases peculiar to her sex. Shall all this be forgotten? And shall the often suffering and sorrowful wife have no sympathy, or very little, from him to whom she has a right to look up? God forbid. It is a mistake to suppose that by "the weaker vessel" here it is meant that the wife is always mentally the inferior of the husband. In many qualities of the mind she often far excels him, and there have been, and still are, women whose acquirements in all branches of science and art equalled those of the most eminent men. The society of many a wife is better, in an intellectual point of view, than her husband will meet with away from home; and as for spiritual conversation and Christian fellowship, hers is often not to be surpassed.

II. **Honour.**—Your wives, says the apostle, are fellow-heirs with you of the grace of life. It is here assumed that both are believers, and, if so, both are partakers of the gift of life flowing from the grace of God. Eternal life begins on earth and is consummated in heaven, so that two things are here implied: that the husband and the wife are one in Christ now, and that hereafter their union will continue in a brighter and a happier sphere. Shall they, then, be afraid to converse with one another on the things of God? Shall they have any secrets in reference either to their outer or their inner life? The union that subsists between them is so close and sacred that, as far as possible, their very thoughts should blend; and if any differences of opinion exist, either with regard to their family affairs or in respect to religious views, they should try to remove them as soon as possible, or should bear with one another in reference to them with all charity and love. Specially should they *honour* one another; and the husband who has a Christian wife should never for one moment fail to see in her one who, equally with himself, bears the signature and stamp of heaven.

III. **The apostle adds a special reason for all this.**—"That your prayers be not hindered." He assumes that the husband and the wife do pray; that they pray not merely *for* one another, but *with* one another; not merely at the domestic altar, but together, when no one else is near. It is said of Philip Henry that he and his wife constantly prayed together morning and evening, and from his own experience of the benefit of the practice he recommended it to all his Christian friends. That your prayers be not hindered, love one another with a pure heart, fervently, with that love which is essential to the happiness of married life (from *Thornley Smith*). The three points in relation to the Christian husband which this passage suggests are: 1. *His authority*, implied in his superiority of physical strength, and in that rule, in the ordering of life-relations, which is implied in "dwelling with them according to knowledge." 2. *His considerateness.* Putting her interest before his own. Giving her all honour. 3. *His religious helpfulness.* The activity and energy, which are manly characteristics, finding expression in the shaping of the religious customs of the home.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 7. *Honour to the Weaker Vessel.*—Read, "as with a weaker vessel, with what is female." This explains the saying, "according to knowledge." The thing which the husband is specially to understand, and take into account, is that he is dealing with a thing less strong than himself. The whole of chivalry is in these words, and St. Peter, next after Christ, may be considered the founder of it. Weakness itself, by being weakness, has a claim upon the strong man's deference and self-submission. The weakness here ascribed to the female sex is primarily that of the body, though it may, perhaps, indicate frailty in other respects as well. If the word "vessel" is to be here a description of a "wife," as some contend on 1 Thess. iv. 4, in a sense in

which it does not equally describe a husband, it is difficult to see with what the vessel is compared and pronounced weaker. "Dwell with the female as with a more delicate vessel or instrument"—than what? If we answer, "than yourselves," it becomes clear that the husbands are, by implication, *less* delicate *vessels*. And this is the case. In 1 Thess. iv. 4 the word "vessel" (whether as receptacle or as instrument) is a description of the *body*, or rather of the *self* as manifested in the body. The word in itself may be used to describe anything made to be serviceable—machinery, tackle and gear, pots and pans, and, in fact, any kind of apparatus or implement; and here it might be very fairly rendered, "as with a weaker thing or object." That which is translated "the wife" is really a neuter adjective, and it is a question whether we are to supply with it the noun "vessel"—"with the female as with a vessel which is weaker"—or whether it is to stand absolutely, "the female," as we say "the good," "the evil," *i.e.* "that which is female." The latter seems, on the whole, simpler and more forcible, as calling closer attention to the fact of weakness being inherent in the sex.—*A. J. Mason, M.A.*

The Husband's Sphere in the Home.—The true home is the brightest spot since the Garden of Eden; but it does not make itself, or come by chance. In building a glad and happy household, each one has a part to perform, and God's choicest blessing comes only when all the members stand in their place and do their duty. The happy home grows out of a union of hearts and hands toward one cherished end. One person alone may do much, but no one can do all that is required. The best is only when there is sympathetic and harmonious blending together, like the different parts of music. When either part fails, there is discord and loss. Complete concert of action between husband and wife is a necessity in any well-ordered home. Perfect confidence and affection must exist between them. To draw apart, tears. To make the home the happiest and most helpful place in the world, each must give the best to it. Not to society, not to business, not to outside intimates, but to the family circle, must the choicest gleanings be brought from all the fields of life, as the bee brings to his hive, and not elsewhere, honey from all the sweetest flowers. The husband has an important sphere. The more he gives to the home, the more it will give to him. The more he is to it, the more it will be to him and to the world. His dividend will be in proportion to his investment. Some complain that their home joys are meagre. Let them remember how mean and beggarly are their contributions. They cannot reap where they do not sow. If they will, they can make the home a source of perennial comfort to themselves, and the means of blessing to many. It should be a bright beacon in this world's night. The word "husband" means a house-band; a band of strength around the home, upholding, protecting, and keeping it together. The home was the first institution God made. The germs of the State and the Church are in it. The husband, as the head of the home, stands at the beginning of all the worthiest elements of Society. In the household he plants the seeds of religion for the Church, and of authority for the State. The family is the spring-head of the nation, the source of its purest spiritual and civil life. It is plain what manner of man the husband ought to be. The husband in the model home must love his wife. St. Paul says, "Husbands love your wives, and be not bitter against them." These are strong words—Bible words. The Bible is the marriage ring. Marriage begins in love. It must continue and end there. The husband must see that the early, tender affection never fails; that the gentle tone of life's morning does not grow harsh. He must love the wife down through old age, and on through fading youthful beauty, to the sunset years, with a love that makes

wrinkles beautiful, and infirmities seem precious. Tell her how much you love her still. Tell it more and more, as the years go on. Never allow the white roses of affection to fade on your lips, and your mouth to grow dumb. A cold silence is a mildew. Some wives would be surprised to hear expressions of endearment from their husbands now. All that ceased long, long ago. Let the husband show his love by his presence, not leaving her, and deserting the home the long evening through, when he can help it. Let the husband cherish his wife, and appreciate what she does, causing her to feel that he sees and esteems her service. Let little attentions never cease, nor delicate thoughtfulness for her welfare. Let the husband shelter his wife under his strong arm, and smooth her path. Let him protect her and stand by her in her cares and trials, and know that she will never look to him in vain. Let him provide for her reasonable wants, that she come not into embarrassment, and feel that he demeans her. Ill temper and hasty words on his part—these are not for the happy home. Some seem to be more considerate of their horse and dog than of their wives, but many a husband is a mule. The true husband will be mindful of his wife's good, and not indifferent to her, for in his smile she lives, and in his frown is chill. A husband's love is the sunshine of the wife. It brings out her beauty of soul, as a spring morning opens the flowers, and sustains her in her deeper needs. Selfishness and disregard to the interests and happiness of the wife, planting one's own self in the centre, and absorbing every good thing in one's own greed, the wife drudging and denying herself for her husband, as the slave for his lord—running to serve his every whim;—this is not found on heathen ground alone. There are home heathens. Genuine love casts out selfishness, and ennobles the heart. It makes it generous and self-denying for all others' sakes. Husbands, love your wives. These are some of the benefits that flow out of domestic love, and in proportion as this love ceases these benefits fail. What if love has ceased already? Do these things and it will come back, as the seeds begin to open when the spring sun shines again. Let the husband honour his wife. Peter says, "Ye husbands, give honour unto the wife, as being joint heirs of the grace of life." Honour her by caring for her needs. In the hard places of life, stand by her side, and give her true sympathy. When children are ill, and burdens press, let her feel that she has a stronghold in you, and give her your comfort. Because she is your wife, you owe her what, without you, she can never have. Bland and polite as treacle some are to guests and outsiders, while in their homes they are domineering and exacting, finding fault with the wife, and criticising her before the children, blaming her for the mishaps, with seldom a kind word. "Oh, it is only my wife!" This is the gilt edge of married life, in a guilty age. Do you say you have no time for all these trifles? In the perfect home there are no trifles. "It is trifles that make perfection, and perfection is no trifle." Honour her by sharing your joys with her, as she shares all your cares, taking on herself in the family the heaviest part. Allow her to be with you when she can, to go with you when she may, and to enter into your life. Do not add to her crosses by leaving her to doubt you. Do not lay up food for sad reflection when death comes, and plant thorns in your pillow against that hour. The time to love, honour, and help her, is when these things are needed. When death has entered, and plucked the lilies from her cheek, it will be too late then to lighten her lot, or speak her praises. Honour her by taking her into counsel with you. She will be wise with a true woman's wisdom. Insight and intuition are her gift, and she will give her husband her best thought, and be happy that it is sought. In all the affairs of life, a

true woman's judgment has its uses. Many a man has failed for want of it. The counsel at his elbow would have saved him had he sought it. Thus honouring her, she will be made strong. Then, if he takes her into counsel, and honours her in his successes, when failures and reverses come, and trouble and misfortune sweep over them, as they do sometimes over the best and most prosperous, she will, in turn, grandly stand by him and become his polar star, enduring every hardship for his sake with sweet and abiding cheerfulness and courage, never breathing a murmur of complaint. Be worthy of her, and you will find she will be worthy of you. Your lives will develop together. Let the husband be faithful and true to his wife. The evils that I have been speaking of are the little foxes that spoil the vines. But intemperance and infidelity are what Dr. Abbott calls the wolves that destroy the home. The Lord Bishop of Durham founded the White Cross League. It asserts that the time will come when fatherhood will take its place beside motherhood, its Divine counterpart, as equal sharers in the cares which have so ennobled women as to make some of them akin to angels. The pledge of this order declares: "I will maintain the law of purity as equally binding on men and women. I will endeavour to spread these principles among my companions, and try to help my younger brothers. I will use every means to fulfil the sacred command, 'Keep thyself pure.'" If the wife be led into sin, she is denounced and cast off as a thing unclean, with little effort for her reform; yet through all the husband's excesses and untruth to her, and drunkenness and dishonour, she clings to him, pleading and toiling to draw him back into the true path. How the husband owes it to such a being to keep his marriage vows in all fidelity and truth! I have spoken of the little foxes and the wolves of the home. The vampire of wedded life is where an alien comes in between husband and wife, under sanction and authority of the husband, and frets, almost to breaking, the marriage tie, and sucks out the pure joys of connubial life. Every husband should be a Christian in heart and life, and unite with the wife in faith and prayer and the service of God. He should join with her in the training of the children for usefulness here and for heaven hereafter. The husband should not let the wife pray alone. The whole household needs it. He should not allow her to go alone to church. He requires it as much as she. He should be with her at the communion table. Above all, he should not leave to her the Christian education of the children. Alone in this, the wife is a bird with one wing. It is a great wrong to the wife, to put all these trying and difficult duties on her, when God lays them equally on him. Some of the most important ones can only be done by him. Others require their united Christian effort, the closest conference of Christian hearts. A married couple can never be truly one, in the greatest and profoundest interests of life, until both are Christians. The most sacred and blessed side of the soul, that bordering on eternity, they cannot walk together in, until they together know the Lord. How many times does a mother's heart ache for the aid a Christian father could give to her, when perplexed in the household, when things are at cross purposes, and the load seems heavier than she can bear! How barren, after all, is wedded joy, to live together on earth, and for earth only, without the bright hope of dwelling together in eternity, meeting there, never more to part! That home cannot be happiest which looks for no reunion in heaven. The happiest home is always the Christian home, where husband and wife are one at the family altar, as one in interests and affection.—*C. L. Goodell, D.D.*

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MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 8—13.

Christ-like-mindedness.—If such a term can be permitted, it may be regarded as the key-word of this paragraph. St. Peter would have those who live and worship together in the name of Christ, *unanimous*. The Greek word does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament, but the duty is often enjoined (Rom. xii. 16; 2 Cor. xiii. 11; Phil. ii. 2). It involves an agreement, not only in doctrine but also in practical aims. "Oneness of mind," what is meant by it? How can we promote it? 1. By having compassion one of another, or sympathising in one another's weal or woe, weeping with those who weep, and rejoicing with those who rejoice. 2. By loving one another, as brethren in Christ, truly and fervently. 3. By being pitiful, literally of strong bowels, like our Father in heaven, whose bowels yearn with tenderness towards His children, erring and wayward though they are. 4. By being courteous, humble-minded towards every one, and kind in thought and deed. This courteousness implies a sweet and gentle disposition, which displays itself in genuine regard to all around us, deeming every man worthy of respect and honour, however humble his station in life" (*T.S.*). Where this lowliness of mind exists, there will be found unanimity ὁμόφρονες, sympathy συμπαθεῖς, love, *erga sanctos*, φιλάδελφοι, compassion, *erga afflictos*, εὔσπλαγχοι. The teaching of this paragraph may be presented in three closely related divisions.

I. **Like-mindedness is a state of thought and feeling.**—It must be a feature of the Christian life, or it never can find expression in the Christian conduct or in the Christian relations. The associations of the Christian are no mere arrangement of things upon intellectual decisions, or resolves of will. They are shaped and toned by what he is in spirit and character. So the culture of himself and the mastery of life are closely connected. Power in life follows power gained over self. The features of character which make this like-mindedness easy are sometimes merely parts of the natural disposition. Some people seem to be born amiable, and so are easy to live with. But perhaps for most people the conditions of like-mindedness are things to win. Not that they ever can be won by forcing the conduct into any particular moulds. They can only be won by tempering the heart and the thought and the feeling to a particular frame—the Christ-like frame. And that can only be done by the soul's keeping in constant and sensitive relations with the living Christ Himself, and so changing into His image. They can be like-minded with their fellow-Christians who can say, "We have the mind of Christ."

II. **Like-mindedness works out into practical expression.**—How it does in the Church relations, and the social relations, may be illustrated by its working in the family relations. Let husband and wife be of one mind, and all the things of everyday life in the home are smoothed, and shaped, and ordered; difficulties are mastered; differing tempers are harmonised; and each member is helped to forget his own things for the sake of the things of others. In the Church let there but be like-mindedness in the supreme desire for the glory of Christ, and the practical relations will surely be rightly toned, and the difficulties, that must arise in all frail human fellowships, will be easily over-mastered. The quotation in the paragraph illustrates how practical are the ways of the right-minded, Christ-minded man.

III. **Like-mindedness, working out thus practically, gives a man the very best security in life.**—For nobody wants to hurt the really good, kind man, who is always ready to serve others, and does it evidently in the inspiration of that highest of all persuasions, the constraining love of Christ. To injure such a good, kind, Christly man is to injure ourselves. To kill him is to deprive ourselves

and others of his sweet ministry of blessing. Who would ever think of such a thing as injuring Elizabeth Fry or Florence Nightingale? "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. xvi. 7). And the security is also guaranteed by Him whom the right-minded man serves. He is God's servant, and God takes care of His servants.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 8.—*The True Gentleman.*—"Be courteous." It is almost a definition of a gentleman to say that he is one who *never inflicts pain.* He carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or a jolt in the mind of those with whom he is cast—all clashing of opinion or collision of feeling, all restraint or suspicion or gloom or resentment; his great concern being to make every one at ease and at home. He has his eyes on all his company; he is tender toward the bashful, gentle toward the distant, and merciful toward the absurd. He can recollect to whom he is speaking; he guards against unseasonable allusions, or topics which may irritate; he is seldom prominent in conversation, and never wearisome. He makes light of favours when he does them, and seems to be receiving when he is conferring. He never speaks of himself except when compelled, never defends himself by a mere retort; he has no care for slander or gossip, is scrupulous in imputing motives to those who interfere with him, and interprets everything for the best. He is never mean or little in his disputes, never takes unfair advantages, never mistakes personalities or sharp sayings for arguments, or insinuates evil which he dare not say out. From long-sighted prudence, he observes the maxim of the ancient sage, "that we should ever conduct ourselves toward our enemy as if he were one day to be our friend." He has too much good sense to be affronted at insults. He is too well employed to remember injuries, and too indolent to bear malice. He is patient, forbearing and resigned on philosophic principles; he submits to pain because it is inevitable, to bereavement because it is irreparable, and to death because it is his destiny.—*Cardinal Newman.*

Courteousness. — This courteousness implies a sweet and gentle disposition, which displays itself, not in outward acts and formal manners, such as the fashionable world calls courteousness—the politeness and civility that courtiers practise—but in genuine regard to all around us, deeming every man worthy of respect and honour, however humble his station in life. The courteous man is affable, friendly-minded, always trying to please others; and such a man will attract even those who are otherwise, as sweet music attracts the ear, or lovely flowers the eye. Courteousness is a magnet which draws all men to itself, and binds them together like a threefold cord. Some men possess it naturally, or by their training and education, whilst others are rough and uncouth in manner, and it is difficult for them to speak in gentle tones. But Christianity can polish the most unshapely diamond, and it almost invariably makes even the country peasant a true gentleman, however lowly his position, or however poor his garb.—*Thornley Smith.*

Vers. 10, 11. *The Way to Secure Good Days.* It is, on the whole, a healthy characteristic of our times, that men are asking what practical power Christianity can exert on human lives, and on Society. The religion of Jesus Christ is being judged by what it *can do.* But Holy Scripture throughout is mainly concerned with character and conduct. The examples of good men set before us in Scripture are not examples of men of excellent sentiments or opinions merely; they are examples of practically good men. The prophets are ever calling men back to God, and to practical goodness. Our Lord was the most

practical of preachers, and even poured scorn on profession that had no fitting accompaniment in character and conduct. Apostles are never unmindful of the practical applications of the truths they proclaim. Religion that is *unpractical* has no sort of commendation in God's Word. The spirit of the older age associated long and healthy life with moral goodness, and even regarded it as the Divine reward of such goodness. The apostles do not try to take the details of conduct into their control. They implant principles, and they present models and ideals, leaving these to exert their own influence. The text is a characteristic apostolic counsel, though the form of it is taken from one of the earlier psalms. It brings before us a reasonable desire, and reminds us how that desire may be attained.

I. **A reasonable desire.**—"He that will love life, and see good days." The love of life and desire to prolong it are quite natural. Life is God's best gift to us, and it ought to be counted as our chief treasure. The love of life is the basis of Society; the secret of man's right relations with his brother. For his jealousy in guarding the treasure of his own life makes him careful to preserve the treasure of life for his brother. It may be thought that the supreme interest which the Christian has in the *life to come* ought to make him indifferent to the continuance of the life that is. But that notion belongs to extravagant sentiment, and has no countenance in Bible teachings. Every one of us ought to try to live here on earth, keeping up our loving service to our Divine Lord, just as long as ever we can. And the restfulness and peace which piety brings ought to be important aids towards the prolongation of life. But St. Peter uses another expression for the befitting Christian desire. A man should hope for *good days*; days filled up with goodness, in the sense of good doings, and consequent good enjoyings.

II. **This reasonable desire attained.**—The apostle lays down three conditions, and they are all thoroughly practical: all proved to be essential, as he declares them to be, by the experience of earnest men through all the ages. 1. He who would have good days will have to *rule his speech*. And his chief work will be restraining, holding back, keeping silence. Readiness to talk is the constant temptation. The most difficult of virtues, for most men, is "not answering again." If we would see how this ruling of our speech stands related to "seeing good days," let us think how many of the misunderstandings, and separations, and troubles, and wrongs of our lives have come out of hasty, unwise, unkind, impure speeches. Let us think how often we have spoiled the happiness of others, and broken up our own peace, by the utterance of foolish and unworthy words. 2. He who would have good days will have to *order his conduct*. That involves work of two kinds, each closely related to the other. As soon as we take our life into our hands, and resolve to get it into fair and good shape, we find there is much to get away, to cut off, to pluck out, to put from us. The attaining of good ever goes along with the clearing out of evil. And this makes the moral conflict of our lives. But the putting away of evil must be accompanied with strong feelings of repulsion towards it. The good man finds sin unpleasant in his mouth, and would fain be quit of it. He *eschews* evil. But our Lord taught that the house was in peril if the evil spirit were only driven out, and the house left "empty, swept, and garnished." We must be doing good, seeking good, filling up our lives with good; filling them so full that evil cannot even squeeze in edgeways. Activity in goodness is our safeguard. 3. He who would have good days will have *to tone his relationships*. By peace we must understand peaceableness, the spirit of the peace-maker; gentle, considerate, charitable. The *Christ-tone* should be on all our intercourse, and on all our relations. And that rightness, that gentleness, that graciousness, will mightily help to prolong our life, and

bring round to us, over and over again, *good days*.

Ver. 13. *The Safety of the Good.*—The Jews of the Dispersion found it very difficult to live Christian lives in the midst of heathen associations. Silvanus had come to St. Peter bringing tidings of exposure to a fiery trial of persecution. They were accused of being evil-doers, preaching revolutionary doctrines. The very name of "Christian" exposed them to odium and outrage. St. Peter felt that he could not withhold his words of comfort and counsel from those who were thus suffering. After cheering them, by reminding them of their noble standing and high privilege in Christ Jesus, he tells them that their daily lives, in all their relationships, whether as slaves under masters or as citizens under rulers, should be such as to refute all slanders. "In all their sufferings they should follow in the footsteps of the patience and meekness of Christ," their very submission and gentleness disarming all opposition. For all this there were the broad rules of holy living, such as Christ had taught; and those who lived according to these rules may surely trust in God's protection. They know how to defend themselves, but their best defence will be the silent witness of their lives.

I. **Who may be called a "follower of the good"?** What St. Peter understood by "the good" is indicated in vers. 10, 11. The good is always close kin with the "kind." It means the gracious and kindly deed, and the love of peace. The follower of the good is—1. One who can discern the good. When a man is "born again," regenerate in the power of the Holy Ghost, one of the best signs of the change, and one of the best expressions of the new life, is quick discernment of anything and everything that is good. It is as if the magnet were charged with the Divine loadstone of Him who *is good*, and consequently found out, and drew to itself, the iron of goodness everywhere. We must have lost our proper *sensitiveness* as Christians if we find ourselves uncertain whether things offered to our thought, or to our enjoyment, are good or evil. We should *discern* the good. 2. One who chooses the good. The will and the effect must follow on the sensibility and the discernment. The Latin motto is, "I approve the better course, but I follow the worse." But that is the *un*-Christian example. If we know good, we must do the good we know. If we see the good, we must follow it wheresoever it may lead. The Divine regeneration strengthens the will for the choosing and steadily working out of the good. 3. One who recognises the *activity of good*. The righteous are those who have goodness enough in themselves to oppose evil, and try to make other people good, and so win God His triumph. Passive goodness is but a poor, frail, sickly thing, if indeed there is such a thing. You must *be* good, in order that you may *do* good. The term "followers" implies "zealous for.' Every Christly person should be a "zealot" for the good. Goodness a holy passion with him; he living to get it enthroned everywhere.

II. **How may harm come to the followers of the good?**—"Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom." St. Peter had chiefly in mind outward and temporal troubles, the spoiling of the Christian's goods, the slander heaped on the Christian's name, the peril of the Christian's life. Men could harm the Christian's body; they could hinder the Christian's work; they could damage the Christian's reputation. But all these are external to the man, they do not harm the man. Stone walls cannot imprison souls and keep them from their communion with God. Persecutions do not destroy faith. Martyrdom cannot touch the eternal life in Christ Jesus. Though we are not exposed to the perils of the early Christians, none of us fail to need St. Peter's encouragement. 1. Some harm will come from the relics of personal frailty. There are bodily tendencies, inclinations, and passions, ever ready to do us harm. 2. The

earnest Christian must take his share of the common evils that belong to human circumstances. 3. He must even take into account the harm that the foes of goodness may devise against him. These take varying shape for each age. Let men speak evil of us; let men set snares for our feet; let men persecute us according to the fashion of their times; it really does not much matter. *Plato*, being told that he had many enemies who spoke ill of him, replied, "It is no matter; I will live so that none shall believe them." Goodness is an ever-triumphing power over all harm. Goodness can disarm persecutors. Goodness can shield from persecutors. Goodness outlasts the persecutors. Goodness can even get itself better through the persecutions.

The Safe Conduct.—Detail as to Christian conduct forms a feature in the epistles which renders them exceedingly valuable to the Church. They contain specific directions for particular circumstances, and encouragement for moments of trial. St. Peter, in this chapter, deals with the duties imposed by marriage, and also with those inspired by Christian fellowship. He instructs us as to our conduct before the world. Moral courage is an essential element in that conduct (vers. 14, 15). The hallowed presence of God in thought strengthens the Christian in every good purpose. We are strong to resist temptation, to bear trial, and to confront our adversaries, when God is enthroned in our affection.

I. **To follow that which is good is to excite opposition.**—"And who is he that will harm you?" Our persons, our characters, our families, and our worldly affairs, will be attacked. The lion is quiet enough in his den until he hears the footstep of the hunter. It is the tread of virtue in your life that rouses the anger of your enemy. Calmly reflect on the fact that what we must expect from a sinful world is opposition. If this fact is not borne in mind, especially by young Christians, a bitter disappointment will be experienced. The young heart, which has been born again, finds the world all changed. There is a frown where used to be a smile, a repulse where used to be a welcome, and a sharp cut where used to be a healing balm. That tender heart overlooks the fact that the change has taken place in itself, and not in the ungodly surroundings. If we change our front, how can we expect our old companions in sin to countenance us? Think of the accusations we bring against them. We tell them, by our conduct, that they are offenders against man and God, and that they deserve eternal wrath. Is it a wonder, therefore, that their anger should be kindled against us? When the commandment entered, sin revived, and St. Paul experienced a mortal struggle. We have felt the same. If the light of truth encountered such bitter opposition in our own heart, how much more so in the wide world? The Christian character is itself in active opposition to sin. There is a wide difference between the two opposites—the believer carries on a war with the enemy of the unbeliever for his own benefit, but the unbeliever wars against the friend of the believer to his intended hurt. We say *intended* hurt, because it is impossible to damage light. You may exclude it, but harm it you cannot. Truth, honesty, kindness, love, self-sacrifice, and the fear of God, no one can tarnish. Therefore, let not the good which is in us suffer on account of crooked following, but let our course be straight and thorough, that our very presence may excite the envy, malice, hatred, and destructiveness of the evil heart.

II. **To follow that which is good is to cultivate the noblest virtues.**—St Peter in the second epistle, says, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord, according as His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who hath called us to glory and

virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust" (chap. i. 2, 3, 4). "Partakers of the Divine nature," is an expression akin to that used by the apostle St. John: "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The "new creature in Christ Jesus," of St. Paul, and "of His own will begat He us with the word of truth," spoken by St. James, echo the Master's teaching to Nicodemus concerning the new birth: "Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." If such a tree be planted in the human heart, the result cannot otherwise be than the fruit of the Spirit—"love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." The tendrils of the Divine life in man stretch onward in the path of the goodness of God. The safety of the Christian character consists as much in the course it follows as in the overruling hand of God. That course is one of expansion of thought, communion with God, goodwill towards men, and a supreme effort to benefit all mankind by the dissemination of Divine truth. There is but one path to growth and strength before the new-born child. The germs of thought, of emotion, of moral obligation, and of life generally, will only thrive in the good soil adapted to their growth. Give the child wholesome food, fresh air, education, exercise, and exemplary society, and the attributes of manhood will develop and advance towards their final stages. The new man, created in Christ Jesus, in like manner, by following that which is good advances towards the enlargement of its capacities and the perfection of its being. The one path to eternal life yields the fruit of holiness, and imparts the strength necessary to pass over the ground. Therefore we advance in our faith from the bare fact that man cannot harm us, to the second great truth—viz., that the course of virtue affords nourishment for the spiritual man. By doing the right we gain strength, and become more valiant. Prayer to God, justice and mercy to man, and the general conformity to the will of the good God which the gospel prescribes, enlarge our capacity of resistance to evil. To follow that which is good is to "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

III. **To follow that which is good ensures the Divine approval.** — "If God be for us, who can be against us?" The history of the Church shows that "The chariot of God's providence runneth not on broken wheels," as the immortal Rutherford used to say. "Every movement is sure, and every turn of the wheel of Providence secures the good of the Christian. If God smiles upon us, what matters it who may frown?"

> "Do right. And thou hast nought to fear;
> Right hath a power to make thee strong:
> The night is dark, but light is near;
> The grief is short, the joy is long."

The power of right no one can describe. Government, the universe, yea, the throne of God, rests upon it. It has never yet suffered defeat. Sometimes its vindication has tarried long, but not for ever. Clouds cannot impede the course of the sun, although they may hide it from our view. So the chariot of justice cannot be delayed by wicked men. The power of goodness, we would almost say, is still greater. Every thought, word, and deed, which is prompted by eternal love, must travel on to its goal. There is a charm as well as power in doing good. You remember the line of Goldsmith—

> "And learn the luxury of doing good."

It must be done without pomp or desire of glory, as Pope puts it:—

> "Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame."

Furthermore, there is a sense of safety in doing good. We are never stronger than when we are conscious of following God as dear children in the matter

of walking in love. *Fountain* has given us two beautiful lines on this:—

"Happy were men if they but understood
There is no safety but in doing good."

There is One who was called "Good Master." He is the Fountain of Good, the Inspirer of Good, and the Giver of Good. He only can make us good. Unless we are made good we cannot seek it. The great secret of following in a good course is the good heart which the blessed Saviour gives. In the path of virtue, truth, and mercy, there is "a good hope through grace." The greater brightness is at the farther end of the good way. Although there is a dark valley to cross, yet we shall fear no evil, for the *Good* Shepherd will be with us, to safely conduct us into His eternal fold.—*Weekly Pulpit.*

Be Zealous.—The better MSS. give the word (*zelôtai*) which is commonly rendered "zealous for," as in Acts xxi. 20, xxii. 3. As a word in frequent use among devout Jews (as, *e.g.*, in the name of the apostle Simon Zelotes), it has a special force as addressed to the Church of the Circumcision. "Be zealous," he seems to say to them, "not as Pharisees and scribes are zealous, as you yourselves were wont to be, for the Law as a moral and ceremonial code, but for that which is absolutely good."—*Dean Plumptre.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 14—22.

Power Gained through Suffering for Well-doing.—In order to understand, and to feel the force of, the points made in St. Peter's epistle, it must be kept in mind that he wrote to persons who were placed in circumstances of disability, and even exposed to suffering and persecution, on account of their faith in Jesus as Messiah and Saviour, and on account of the Christian lives they were living. The great purpose of the apostle is to afford them consolation, and to strengthen them to bear and persevere. The most difficult passage now before us is greatly relieved of its difficulty when we clearly see that its object is not, primarily, any doctrinal teaching, but comforting, assuring, moral strengthening; and that its characteristic is rather illustration and persuasion than any forth-setting of doctrinal truths. The distinction we fully recognise in our own pulpit-work. Sometimes we are teachers, but sometimes we are preachers, persuaders, comforters; we illustrate and impress known truths; we show the relation known truth bears to existing conditions of difficulty and trial. St. Peter here is *reminding* the disciples of what they knew, rather than unfolding anything new to them. In the paragraph we may find—

I. **A possibility.**—"But and if ye should suffer for righteousness' sake." It is but as a possibility for all; it was a realised fact for some. But when men are brought into suffering, their first idea is that there must be some *wrong* of which it is the punishment. The friends of Job, in trying to convict him of sin, do but represent the commonplace first explanation of all suffering. What we have to admit is, that a man may suffer who is righteous, and may even have to suffer because of his righteousness. That, indeed, is the fact for all ages, but it is the fact which comes out most clearly in these Christian times, because it is the fact so sublimely exhibited in the representative man, Christ Jesus; who "did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief." This is surely a suggestive ground of consolation to the afflicted and persecuted. There is at least the *possibility* that they are suffering for righteousness' sake, even as their Divine Lord had done. And Christian suffering is precisely *that* sort of suffering. Righteousness may be high principle, standard right, or the Christian profession.

II. **Suffering for righteousness is to be accepted as for Christ.**—"Sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord." Not as Lord in any general or abstract way, but

precisely as Lord of those who suffer for righteousness' sake. He is their head, leader, representative; their living leader, whose actual present grace rests on all those who take the same suffering way, and bear their disabilities as loyalty and service to Him. Christ Himself suffered in the same way, "leaving you an example that ye should follow His steps." And it should be a most comforting relief under persecution and distress, to feel that we are but "filling up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ in our body," or in our circumstances. The sting is gone when we know that we are suffering for Christ's sake.

III. **We must not let suffering silence our witness for Christ.**—Precisely that would be the temptation of those early Judaic Christians. When they saw that their witness for Christ brought them misunderstanding and persecution, their first idea would be to save themselves from the trouble by ceasing to make the witness. They would think to keep disciples, but would judge it to be altogether wiser to become silent and secret disciples. This is a most subtle form of temptation, which assails God's people in every age. The psalmist felt it, and resisted it, for he says, "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation; lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, Thou knowest. I have not hid Thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared Thy faithfulness and Thy salvation" (Ps. xi. 9, 10). And St. Paul is almost intense in his demand that confession of Christ shall always go with belief in Christ. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. x. 9). The charm of St. Stephen's example lies in his heroic persistence in rendering his witness for Christ, even in face of hatred and death. And St. Peter here urges these persecuted Christians not to let their troubles silence either the quiet witness of their lives, or the outspoken witness of their lips. Suffering, or not, let them be "ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear."

IV. **Power to witness, and to suffer, depends on keeping a good conscience.**—What makes trouble unbearable is the fear that it is *deserved*. A man is always soul-master of all circumstances, even the most distressing, when he has no conscience of wrong. We see this in its perfection in Christ. He felt suffering acutely, but He bore it nobly, because none could convict Him of sin, nor could His own conscience. "Keep conscience as the noon-tide clear," and you can go through a midnight darkness, and a world of woes unspeakable. "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" St. Paul stands calmly before the raging Sanhedrin that longed for his blood because he could say, "Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day" (Acts xxiii. 1). So St. Peter urges upon the persecuted disciples that they should have and keep "a good conscience, that, wherein ye are spoken against, they may be put to shame who revile your good manner of life in Christ."

V. **Christians should find the model of their sufferings in the sufferings of Christ.**—"Because Christ also suffered for sins once." Yes, "for sins," but not His own. He suffered, "the righteous for the unrighteous." And His sufferings are a model of ours in two ways. 1. They came upon Him through the malice and wickedness (sins) of men; and 2. They came on Him through His undertaking to deal with the sins of men, to deliver men from their penalties and dominion. Christians are in the world to do what Christ did, and they must fully expect to have to suffer in the doing, even as Christ did.

VI. **Christians should find the suggestion of what their sufferings might enable them to do, in what Christ's sufferings enabled Him to do.**—St. Peter's point here is this: Christ's suffering in well-doing unto death, brought Him altogether unique *spiritual power*; and he suggests that just what the noble endurance of their troubles would bring these persecuted Christians was a *unique*

spiritual power. To set forth this he uses an illustration, taken from a popular idea then prevailing in the Christian community, which was afterwards embodied in a strange and fantastic legend, known as the "Gospel of Nicodemus." The verses 19-21 are properly an illustrative parenthesis, intended to illuminate the declaration that Christ, after His bodily suffering, was "quickened in the spirit" to become, what He has become ever since, an unique spiritual power; such a power as He could only become through the experience of suffering in well-doing; such a power as we only can gain through the same experience. The "baptism" of ver. 21 is not the *rite* of baptism on confession of faith, but the baptism of suffering which the disciples were undergoing, and the reference is to the baptism of suffering which Noah underwent through all the long years of waiting, in which he was scorned and persecuted, but through which he was kept and saved. Noah kept a good conscience all through. His discipline was no "putting away of the filth of the flesh." You, too, should keep a good conscience; then you would see that your sufferings, like Noah's, and like your Lord's, were no mere discipline, but were that sublimest of sublime things, vicarious ministry.

VII. **Christians should find the suggestion of what their sufferings will result in in what Christ's sufferings resulted in.**—Taking out the parenthesis, the point St. Peter would impress comes fully into view. "Being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ; Who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him." When Christ's bodily sufferings in well-doing reached even to the extremity of death, they proved to be but the way in which *spiritual power* was quickened and developed, and to that spiritual power, free for the largest, noblest service, the highest, holiest trusts and authorities are now committed. "Suffer on, then," St. Peter would say, "suffering in well-doing, well borne, can but have such results for us as we see in the case of our Divine and blessed Lord."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 15. *A Reason for our Hope.*—The word is literally *an apology*, but that word is now used in the sense of *an excuse*, so that the rendering of our version is correct—*a reason*; and *that* every one should be able to give for his hope, readily and whenever he is asked for it. Not that we are bound, as Christians, to answer any scoffer that may assail our faith; but if any one comes to us and asks us on what we are resting our hope, what ground we have for it, or how we can defend it, we should be prepared to give a reply; yet, as Luther says, "not with proud words or with violence, but with such fear and humility as if we stood before the judgment-seat of God." But can an unlettered Christian be expected to do this, especially in such times as these, when the Christian faith is assailed at every point in the most subtle manner, and with the greatest skill? Yes; for though he may not be able to answer all the objections of the sceptic, yet, inasmuch as his hope is a matter of experience, he can easily give such reasons for it as a candid mind would accept. And how many, who have been perfectly ignorant of the learning of the schools, perfectly unacquainted with the arts of disputation, have been able, in a few words, to put to silence those who have called their hope in question! But only those can do this who have a good conscience—a conscience void of offence before God and before man. He who keeps a good conscience is in possession of a good hope, and can defend that hope with good reasons which the world around him will not be able to gainsay. Of our hope we need never be ashamed, for we have answers for it ready—not far to seek; and if those who question us about it are not satis-

fied with them, we can maintain it still, assured that it will not fail us when we are anticipating its fruition. But there are times when silence is our best answer, and when it will have greater weight than all the assertions we can make, and all the arguments we can use.—*Thornley Smith.*

The Reason of Hope.—There is here a play upon the words in the original Greek which we fail to see in our versions. In seems in English as if there were a contrast between the "giving the answer" and the "reason," when, in fact, they are the same. We might read it: "Be ye ready always to give a *justification* to every one who would require you to *justify* the hope that is in you." St. Peter, realising that the Christian religion is a hopeful religion, says to the strangers scattered abroad, to whom he writes, "You must have a *reason* for the hope that is in you. You must not be content to look only on the bright side of things and shut out the dark side, to hear only pæans of peace and not to notice the sounds of battle. You must have a reason for this hope in times of darkness and trial, as well as in seasons of sunshine and joy." Let us try to answer this question: What are the Christian's reasons for hope—hope for ourselves, for our families, and for our nation?

I. **We believe in a God of hope.**—We believe that God created the world, that He is a God of foresight and love, that He knew what He was about when He made life, and that He will bring out of our imperfect life here a nobler and a better one. We believe that when He sowed the seed He knew that there would not be a gathering in of tares, but that the wheat would overbalance the tares in the last great harvest. We believe He is a God of hope, and that He understands human nature better than we can. He saw the darkness, but yet He hopes; and so we can hope. Again, He has given a definiteness to the hope. We look at the savage in his degradation; he is not the true man; he is only the beginning of man. We look at Society and we say, This is not God's ideal of man. We come to the New Testament and we see the life of Christ, Jesus of Nazareth. He was the type of true manhood. In Him we see what God meant man to be. He represents what you and I are to be if we fulfil God's plan. As we look at this pattern we hear the voice of God saying, You also are to be the sons of God. So we gather inspiration from the thought that this is what God intends man shall be. How shall man become this? I look at an acorn. It says to me, By-and bye I shall be a great tree; by-and-bye the birds will nest in my branches; by-and-bye I shall be a shelter to those who dwell under my roof; by-and-bye I shall carry many over the great Atlantic. But, I say to the acorn, "Can you be all this?" "Yes, *God* and I!" So man will be like the great Pattern; for it is God and man. We see by faith, more and more, that God is doing this. We see Him moving and shaping man more and more in accordance with His purpose. If we could have seen the world in its first stage of creation, in its chaotic condition—"without form and void"—and if, then, any one could have said to us that this was to become a place where man should dwell in happiness and glory—that from all this should come order and beauty—we should have scoffed at the idea, unless we could have seen that God was there, that His Spirit was brooding over the water, and bringing out this great result. So we look on humanity, in its defects and imperfections, and we say: This is but the chaotic state; God is at work; He can change all to beauty. God is in human history and is bringing order out of chaos. But there are limitations of our hope. We must be willing to look at the dark side sometimes. Some hopes may be disappointed. Our desires may not be realised. We have hope for America; but Egypt, Babylon, Greece, Rome, and other great civilisations, have perished. We are not sure what

plan God is to work out in this our beloved nation. But whether the nation perishes or lives, we know that humanity will still move on. God's purposes are sure. We know that we love purity and truth all the more because there are some in our own dear land who are working against them. We are not sure of religious organisations. We are not sure that Congregationalism was the apostolic church. Congregationalism is not the great thing, but humanity. All things that mould human life may change, but man lives on. The tools are nothing, but the building; and that which God is building is manhood. The battle of the Reformation has passed, but the conception of the Reformation—that God is mercy as well as justice—remains. To-day we are debating on probation and a future life, as if we knew all about them, when how little we know! Churches, creeds, nations, may disappear, but human character will grow and grow, because God is begetting man, and working out His ideal manhood. These things are but His instruments. The seed enters the ground, and out of it comes the tulip, the lily, because God is working in it. Because we believe that God is working within man we have a sure hope of the future; for God knows what He is doing. This, you say, is a large outlook, but how about myself? I don't care so much about the race as my own individual life. There are no large things with God and no little things with God. It is not a strange declaration of Christ's that the hairs of our heads are numbered, and that not a sparrow falls to the ground without His notice. The little things are the determining things. It is the small rudder that guides the great ship. We believe in a God who not merely deals with nations or with masses, but One who looks on every cradle, on every soul. We have a true hope, that cheers our hearts and is with us in darkness as well as in light. We believe in One whose mercy is "from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him." In closing I want to turn to a second text: "Without hope in the world." Atheism is hopeless. Can there be a nation without God? Do you write over that precept, "Put not your trust in princes," put your trust in politicians? Without God there is no hope for a nation. There is no hope for a Church if there be not an open door to take in the love of God. What is your hope for your children? If there is no God to guide, you might as well attempt to lead them through the great wilderness of Sahara as to hope to guide them safely through this life, fraught with its many dangers. What is your hope for yourself? Do you carry God to your work, to your store, in society? Do you live with God? Our hope rests in God. We believe that there is One working in humanity who is shaping all according to His wise purpose. This is the reason of our hope.—*Lyman Abbott, D.D.*

Rationalism.—This term is usually employed to describe an attitude of the mind adverse to religion, and especially adverse to the belief in Christianity. But this is incorrect and unfair. Christianity claims to be a rational religion. It sprang from the most rational, perhaps one might say the only rational, religion of the old world, the religion that protested against polytheism, and idolatry, that taught men to believe in God, and not to worship the hosts of heaven, nor to deify the forces of nature, nor to bow down to images graven by art and man's device. The Israelites, so far as they were faithful to their religion, were the rationalists of their time; and Christianity claims to be a rational religion. This claim is distinctly made for it by Peter in our text, and as distinctly by Paul, when he speaks of the Christian's presenting himself to God a living sacrifice as a "reasonable service." Taking the whole of Christ's teaching as recorded in the gospels, we can truthfully say of it that, while

it contains much that is above our comprehension, and much that we may think hard in the way of precept, still it is a teaching distinguished by its reasonableness. The Reformers were, to a remarkable extent, rationalists. They found Christianity so corrupted in doctrine, in morals, in ritual, as to have become almost an irrational religion. Against such corruptions they uttered their protest, and argued the whole case in a highly rational manner. They did much towards substituting a sober and reverential *reason* for blind submission to ecclesiastical authority. Looking at rationalism as the application of reason to the investigation of religion, what has it done? 1. It demanded, and secured, the right of all men to possess and read the Scriptures. 2. It has done much towards the destruction of belief in many degrading superstitions. 3. We owe to it the cessation of all persecution for religious opinions and practices. 4. The spirit of rationalism being largely of a practical and utilitarian character, it has done much toward bringing to the front the ethics of Christianity, to make less of religious dogma, and more of religious conduct. There have been times when conduct has counted for little, but orthodoxy in creed was everything. Rationalism has taught men to be less positive and dogmatic in regard to the unseen, the infinite, the unknowable, and has turned the current of religious thought and feeling and life more into the channel of moral and spiritual utility. 5. It has compelled Christians to consider and to set forth the reason or reasons they have for the hope that is in them. I am far from saying that rationalism has done no harm. It has affected very many minds with much painful, much agonising doubt; it has wrenched from many their Christian faith and hope. If rationalism has brought into prominence the practical, useful, beneficent characteristics of Christianity, it has, on the other hand, acting on less worthy minds, made men proud, and vain, and impious, and, in regard to all beneficent work, indifferent, sceptical, cold, and dead. It has in many instances enlightened the intellect, at the terrible cost of stunting the affections; it has given men broader views, but has in proportion narrowed their sympathies; it has fed their minds, but starved their hearts. Whatever be the successes of rationalism, it has its failures, and very grievous failures. It fails in unity. There are rationalists and rationalists. The name does not indicate just one clearly-defined class or sect. If there be anything in the argument against Christianity, on the ground of diversity of opinion held by its professors, the same objection may be urged against rationalism. It fails, too, in not furnishing clear and definite rules for the conduct of life. It is not provided with any high and powerful motive to influence men for good, to lead them to exercise self-denial, to cause them to devote themselves to the welfare of society or of any portion of it. It cannot deal with the sense and conviction of sin; and it fails us just where we most need help and guidance: it may accompany us to the end of our earthly journey, casting much light over our path, instructing us, interesting us, and proving of great advantage to us in many things of a secular character; but the end of the journey is reached, and rationalism can go with us no farther, and its light goes out. Mr. Lecky says of rationalism, "Utility is perhaps the highest motive to which reason can attain." And he laments the discouragement given by rationalism to disinterestedness, to generosity, to self-sacrifice, to true moral heroism. These defects, which are inherent in its very nature, and cannot be made up for by any other perfections, however valuable, will probably in time form a check to rationalism, and cause it to be rejected, as so many other systems have been rejected. And rationalism, now in all the height of its greatness and its strength, may turn out to be only a passing wave of thought, over which the ark of God's covenant of grace

will float with safety, thus giving another witness to its unchangeable strength, to the wisdom of Him who guides it, and to the security of those who have fled to it for refuge.—*H. Stowell Brown.*

Vers. 17, 18. *The Secret of True Greatness.*—There is a marked difference between the standard by which we measure the men of our own day and the men of a past age. When we study a past epoch, we are neither blinded by our interests nor our prejudices, nor are we dazzled by merely outward shows. We now delight to honour only the men who have uttered great thoughts, wrought great deeds, lived great lives; and these are often men who made no great noise in their day. Two classes all men select for reverence, and rank among the great—at least, when their day is past. 1. Those who, possessed of large natural gifts, cultivated them wisely, and devoted them to the public good. In proportion as these men have *suffered* in and for their endeavours to enlighten or benefit the world, the world has taken them to its very heart, and they have assumed heroic proportions in the eyes of all subsequent generations. 2. Those who have been able to frame for themselves an heroic conception of duty, and to live by it. Any good historian, any competent judge, would affirm that the nation was to be accounted great which was capable of an heroic self-devotion, which had men and women who could dare and endure all things for a noble cause. And in *this* class, too, those whom the world honours most are still those who have *endured* most and most bravely, those who have suffered most for the sake of others, who have been animated by the most generous and disinterested spirit. That which touches and moves men, till they grow ashamed of their own useless and self-pleasing lives, is the courage that dares and endures, the love which conquers selfishness, and is ready to fling away life itself if only others can thus be served or saved. This is the true greatness, the true heroism. Why, then, when the man Christ Jesus does a deed of this very kind—the kind which all men admit to be most noble and heroic, a deed which differs from that of other men only in being incomparably more heroic, more noble, more unselfish—why does not the world admire *Him*, and take Him to its heart? He *suffered* for us; suffered an agony which we cannot so much as conceive—a passion of which the cross is a pathetic but utterly inadequate symbol—that He might bring us back to life and freedom, health and peace. Are we not, then, bound to love Him, and to devote our life to His service? The text contains and enforces the secret of true greatness when it bids us carry well-doing to the suffering point. Have we not here a most welcome side-light thrown on that great mystery, the function and purpose of evil? How should we suffer in and for well-doing if there were no evil in and around us? In the last resort, all our miseries, all our sufferings, spring from sin. The invincible ignorance, the obstinate prejudices, the persistent selfishness of our fellows, their enmity to the truth, which cuts their prejudices against the grain, and to the righteousness which rebukes their vices, or imposes a check on their passion—all these come of evil. It is from these that men suffer when bent on doing well; it is by these that they are hindered, thwarted, and at times driven back in apparent defeat. So that, after all, it would seem that to creatures such as we are, in such a world as this, what we call "evil" is necessary to our education and discipline in goodness, to our culture in impersonal and unselfish habits and aims; to the development, in fine, of the very elements and qualities in our nature, which are universally confessed to be the noblest and best. This line of thought yields a glimpse into the mystery of the Incarnation. Any man—any theist, at least—will acknowledge it to be of the first importance that we should come to know and love God. But we cannot find Him out to per-

fection, whether by the searching inquest of reason, or by the more vital and gracious intuitions of the heart. If we are to know Him as we need to know Him, He must reveal Himself to us. He must limit Himself. He must speak to us in *our* language, since we cannot understand His. But He must use *our noblest language*, that which most intimately appeals to our conscience and heart, that which can be apprehended by all the kindreds of this divided earth. Our noblest language, that which all can apprehend and admire, which touches and moves all races and all classes with a common emotion, to a common enthusiasm, is, as we have seen, the language of noble deeds, of a noble life—the language of that heroic greatness which is content to suffer for doing well, and able to draw from its sufferings new life and vigour for the spirit. This, then, is the language which God must deign to use, if He would in very deed reveal Himself to us. And this is the language in which the gospel of Christ is written. Christ *suffered* for us. God has spoken, He has shown Himself to us, if only we believe that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. This line of thought also supplies us with a noble incentive to a noble life. One kind of greatness is beyond our reach. No man can *make* himself a great statesman, a great poet, or even a great theologian. We must accept our natural capacities and gifts, whatever they may be. But the highest kind of greatness, that which most deeply moves the hearts of men, is open to us all. *Well-doing* is not a close profession; it is open to us, and to all men. When St. Peter sets before us the example of Christ, and stimulates us to a self-effacing devotion to duty and conviction by reminding us how *He* once suffered for our sins that He might bring us to God, then surely He supplies us with the keenest, the most pathetic and constraining of all motives, of all incentives, to a great and noble life. For we cannot be followers of Christ *and not follow Him;* nor can we follow Him save as we take the way of the cross.—*S. Cox, D.D.*

Ver. 18. *The Power of Suffering Innocence.*—"Because Christ also suffered for our sins once." This passage is found in the midst of very practical counsels. It is an instance of the characteristic New-Testament advice urged by the example of Christ, or by directly Christian motives. It should ever be borne in mind that the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ is an inspired morality; its key-note is "righteousness."

I. **The practical lesson which the apostle is here urging.**—Compare vers. 13, 14, with ver. 17. Describe the particular circumstances of difficulty and strain in which the early Church was placed, dwelling especially on the slandering and misrepresentation to which the Christians were subject, and even the actual persecution which they were called to endure. St. Peter says there is a kind of happiness they should have in being called to suffer innocently, for righteousness' sake, even as their Divine Lord and Master had to suffer. That suffering innocence God makes to be the very highest moral force in His world of humanity. In every sphere of life the truth is true, that he who can *suffer*—undeservedly, and in the spirit of heavenly Divine charity—can *save*. Suffering for evil doing says nothing, and does nothing; it has to be borne, and there is nothing more to be said about it. Suffering for well-doing sublimely exhibits faith in God, self-restraint, power of character, and a measure of likeness to the Lord Jesus.

II. **The example of Christ by which this lesson is urged.**—1. In Him was a fellowship with us in suffering. Both He and we share together the common sufferings which belong to humanity, and the special sufferings which come to men whenever they resist the tendencies of the world around them in the spirit of loyalty to God. 2. His suffering was through-

out suffering innocence, the suffering that comes through persistent well-doing. 3. And His suffering was caused by the wrong, the sin of others. It might be the result of prejudice, or misunderstanding, or false notions of loyalty to God, but it was always, in some form, man's waywardness, wilfulness, self-pleasing, that brought round bitterness, distress, and suffering, to Christ.

III. **The influence that such suffering innocence has on human hearts.**—It "brings men to God." It may be difficult, with our spiritual apprehension of the Divine Fatherhood, for us to state clearly the way in which God needs to be reconciled to man. We cannot know our hearts without having the deepest conviction that we need reconciling to Him. Now, the spectacle of suffering innocence is the most moving thing on earth. And when that suffering innocence is seen to be directly related to *our sin*, and borne in the power of a self-sacrificing love to us, it makes us hate the sin, and feel drawn to the sufferer. And we may be sure that our suffering in righteousness will be a moral power on others, even as Christ's was, and is, upon us.

The Man-side of the Redemption.—"That He might bring us to God." It is generally recognised that there are two sides to the great redemptive work. But its relation to the government and righteousness of God must always be to us a mystery only partly comprehended. We can form doctrinal systems, based on what revelations of the being and nature of God we have been able to receive, but there is always this uncertainty: if we knew God more perfectly, we might have to modify our system. We are on clearer, safer ground when we try to understand how the redemption bears relation to *us*, removes the hindrances that keep us from God, bears a gracious influence on us, so as to fit us for coming to God, and actually brings us to Him, and keeps us in gracious relations with Him. St. Paul set forth the manward side of redemption in a very forcible way in his famous passage (2 Cor. chap. v. 19, 20), "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God."

Dean Plumptre's Exegesis of 1 Peter iii. 18-20.—The train of thought which leads the apostle to refer to the "descent into hell," is, at first sight, far from clear; but it is clearer by far on the assumption that this is what he has in view, than on the supposition that he is thinking of a work done by Christ as preaching in the days of Noah to the spirits that were afterwards in prison. The assignment of such a work to Him as the Christ is at all events entirely foreign to the cycle of apostolic thought and language. Let us examine the passage on the other assumption, and see how it bears the test. The analogy of 1 Cor. vii. 34, Col. ii. 5, as regards the use of the case of Rom. i. 4, 1 Tim. iii. 16, as regards the antithesis between the "flesh" and "spirit" of our Lord's human nature, compels us to alter the rendering of the Authorised Version. The dative is not that of the instrument in either clause, but that of "the sphere to which a general predicate is to be limited." To take it as having one force in the first clause, and a different one in the second, is to do violence to the natural structure of the sentence. The authority of all the great uncial MSS. and of all recent editions, is against the insertion of the article before "spirit" and without it, as the sentence stands, the reference of the second clause to the agency of the Holy Spirit cannot be supported. We have therefore to take the words as meaning that Christ was "put to death in the flesh, but quickened, endowed with a new power of life, in His spirit." They connect themselves with the death-cry on the cross, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." That moment of outward death to the

body was the entrance of the spirit into a higher life. That thought is what the apostle is anxious to impress on those who were exposed to persecution, suffering, death. Let men do their worst, if they "armed themselves with the mind of Christ," death would be to them gain, not loss, would bring with it freedom from sin and an increase of spiritual energy. He goes on to speak of the nature of that new energy. "In" [not "by"] "which also He went and preached to the spirits in prison." The "flesh" was placed in the tomb, but He, in that other element of His nature, went where go the "spirits" of other men. Almost as if consciously guarding against the distortions of the plain meaning of the words which take their place among the monstrosities of exegesis, St. Peter repeats the word which he uses here ["having gone"] when he comes to speak, in ver. 25, of Christ's ascension ["having gone into heaven"]. In both cases there was, as measured by his thoughts, a local motion. As in Eph. iv. 9, 10, the ascent involved a descent. And there he "preached." That word had been familiar to the apostle's ear during his Lord's ministry on earth. It had become familiar to the Church through the oral or written narratives of the gospel history. Taken by itself it would suggest, naturally, not to say inevitably, a continuance of the work that had been done on earth, a "preaching" of like nature with that which had been heard in Galilee: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And to whom did He thus preach? The answer is, "To the spirits in prison," to human spirits like His own, who were in that Hades which was for them a prison-house, in which they were in ward, awaiting a yet future judgment. So far his words were general. But he has in his mind one representative class of all those spirits of the dead to which his Lord's teaching had once and again led his thoughts (Matt. xxiv. 37; Luke xvii. 26). Never in the history of the world, as told in the Hebrew records, had there been so vast and terrible a judgment, sweeping off so many myriads, following upon such slighted "long-suffering." That, if any, was a crucial instance of the extent of the redeeming work of Christ. The whole history, as he goes on to show, was as a parable in its inner meaning. The Church of God was as the ark; the water of the Flood in which the world was, as it were, born again to a new stage in its life, answered to the baptism which saves men now. Then the disobedient died, and were swept away, but the suffering once for all of Christ for sin, the just for the unjust, availed in its retrospective action to bring to God some at least of those who had thus disobeyed. Much more would His resurrection and ascension, after that triumph over "authorities and powers," avail to save those who suffered as He suffered, and for whom baptism was not merely the "putting away the filth of the flesh, but the *enquiry* of a good conscience after God." The connexion between the words "for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead" (1 Pet. iv. 6), and that "preaching to the spirits in prison" is very close. We have to follow the thoughts of the apostle, as, with that aspect of the descent into Hades present to his mind, he was led on to speak of Christ as of Him that "is ready to judge the quick and dead." Not only to those of whom he had before spoken, the "disobedient" in the days of Noah, but to the "dead" generally, had the gospel, in some way or other, been preached. In what way he does not think it necessary to add. But to what end, with what intention, was that gospel so preached to them? He gives the answer in words which remind us of the antithesis between "flesh" and "spirit" in 1 Peter iii. 18. As Christ was there said to have been "put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit," so of these he says, that the gospel was preached to them "that they might be judged after the manner of men, as men in

the flesh, but live according to God, as He wills, in the spirit." κατὰ θεόν, as in Rom. viii. 27; 2 Cor. vii. 9; Eph. iv. 24.

Quickened in the Spirit.—But *in* His spirit He was quickened, or brought again to life. His spirit never died; but, as to it, He was made alive again, that spirit re-entering the body on the morning of the third day, ere it saw corruption, and thus giving it the victory over death and the grave. He has a body now, but it is a spiritual, and not a fleshly one; and that body has passed into a state of inconceivable glory, such as, in His Divine nature, He had with the Father before the world began (John xvii. 5). —*Thornley Smith.*

Sketch of the "Gospel of Nicodemus," by Dean Plumptre.—The starting point of the narrative is that two sons of Simeon (the Simeon of Luke ii.), Karinus, and Leucius, were among those who had risen from their graves at the time of the resurrection, and had appeared to many (Matt. xxvii. 57). They tell the tale of what they had seen and heard in the world of the dead. They were with their fathers in the thick darkness, when suddenly there shone upon them a bright light as of the sun. Adam and the patriarchs and prophets exulted at its coming. Isaiah knew it to be the light that should shine upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death. Simeon saw that it was the light to lighten the Gentiles, over which he had rejoiced in his *Nunc dimittis.* The Baptist doing there also the work of the forerunner, came to prepare the way and announce the coming of the Son of God. Seth narrated how Michael the archangel had told him, as he prayed at the gates of Paradise, that one day, after five thousand five hundred years, the Son of God would come to lead his father Adam into Paradise, and to the tree of mercy. Meantime Hades (here personified as an actor in the drama) and Satan held counsel with each other, and were full of fear. He who had rescued so many of their victims upon earth, who had raised Lazarus from the grave, was now about to invade their kingdom, and to set free all who were shut up in prison, bound with the chain of their sins. And as they spoke there was a cry like as of thunder: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in." Hades sought in vain to close the gates, and to set fast the bars. David and Isaiah uttered aloud the prophecies in which they had foretold this victory. Death and Hades trembled, and owned themselves conquered. They saw that One had come to set free those who were fast bound with the evil of their nature, to shed light on those who were blinded with the thick darkness of their sins. Hades and Satan wearied themselves in vain murmurs and recriminations. Adam and his children were rescued from the power of Hades; Satan and his hosts were left to take their place. Then the Lord stretched forth His hand and said, "Come unto Me, all My saints who have My image and similitude." Adam and the saints rose up from Hades with psalms of jubilant thanksgiving; prophets burst out into cries of joy. Michael the archangel led them all within the gates of Paradise. There they were met by Enoch and Elijah, who had not tasted death, and were kept there till they should return to earth before the coming of Antichrist. There, too, was the repentant robber, bearing on his shoulders the cross to which he owed his entrance within the gates. The cross on which the redemption of mankind had been achieved was left, according to another version of the legend, in Hades itself, as a perpetual witness of the victory thus gained, that the ministers of Death and Hades might not have power to retain any one whom the Lord had pardoned. All this, of course, is wildly fantastic; the play of an over-luxuriant imagination, seeking to penetrate into the

things behind the veil. But a *mythus* of this kind pre-supposes the existence of the belief of which it is the development, and is, therefore, so far as its date can be ascertained, an evidence as to its antiquity.

Vers. 18-22. *Christ's Sufferings Influencing the Unseen World.*—Point: Better to suffer for well-doing, since Christ suffered thus. In chap. ii. 21 Christ's *example* of suffering is prominent. Here note the advantage which accrued from the suffering.

I. **Christ's sufferings.**—1. Suffered once. 2. Suffered for sin. 3. Suffered vicariously. 4. Put to death in the flesh, made alive in the spirit.

II. **The effect of these sufferings on the unseen world.**—Who are meant by the "spirits in prison"? Those who, before the Flood, resisted the grace of God in Noah's time. The judgment came, and they were hurried into the unseen world, not hell; and their doom was not finally fixed. There must be millions more such. The hopeless condition of those who have rejected Christ we know, but there are millions who have never heard of Christ. Two suggestions: 1. Christ preached of old to them by His spirit in Noah. 2. Christ went to the abode of the dead, and preached to them in His disembodied spirit.—*Thornley Smith.*

Webster and Wilkinson's Notes on 1 Peter iii. 19.—This is given as the most careful setting of the explanation which finds reference to a preaching of Christ to the antediluvians through the agency of Noah. τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασι. Possibly, "to the spirits in safe keeping" (2 Pet. ii. 4, 9; Jude 6). ᾅδης, the invisible mansion of departed spirits, is where the righteous are preserved till the season shall arise for their advancement to future glory; in the other division, Tartarus, or Γεέννα, the souls of the wicked are reserved unto the judgment of the great day (Luke xvi. 23). The abode of the blessed is a place of custody, though not of penal confinement. "It is a place of seclusion from the external world, a place of unfinished happiness, consisting in rest, security, and hope, rather than enjoyment. It is a place which the souls of men never would have entered had not sin introduced death, from which there is no exit by any natural means for those who have once entered. The deliverance of the saints from it is to be effected by the Lord's power" (*Bishop Horsley*). πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν. When was this? and in what manner? Some think that the πνεῦμα of Christ between His death and resurrection went to the place where the antediluvian sinners were in confinement, and proclaimed that He had offered the sacrifice for their redemption. This announcement would give fresh animation of joy to those who through faith had embraced the Redeemer, and would set forth the justice of God in condemning those who neglected the way of escape. Others, again, consider that the proclamation refers to the offers of mercy made to them during their earthly existence, by the agency of Noah, the δικαιοσύνης κήρυξ (2 Pet. ii. 5). If we consider the purpose for which this fact is mentioned here, we shall see reason to adopt the latter view, and to conclude that those to whom Christ is said to have preached were the antediluvian sinners in the time of Noah. Clearly the object of the apostle is to show that Christ acted for the salvation of men, in the administration of the Spirit, in former and ancient times, even as He now does, since His passion and resurrection. A gospel of grace and righteousness, of faith and obedience, was preached to them as to us, by which the obedient lived as now, but under which the unbelieving and disobedient perished (chap. iv. 6). There is a striking resemblance between this passage and Heb. iii. 7—iv. 11, where the example of the ancient Israel is introduced for the same purpose as that of the antediluvians, lost and saved, is introduced here. The apostle represents Christ as having gone and proclaimed a gospel of grace and faith

to the spirits now in prison when they were in their state of earthly existence. The expression πορευθεὶς ἐκήρ., as applied to Christ preaching by Noah, may be compared with Eph. ii. 17, ἐλθὼν εὐηγγελ. εἰρ. ὑμῖν, which applies to His preaching by the apostles. Christ preached in Noah's preaching, and that preaching was without effect, except for the souls of Noah and his household.

Other Views.—Other interpretations of the passage divide into two classes: (1) Those which accept the words as referring to a descent into Hades, and (2) those which give them an entirely different interpretation. Under (1) we have—(*a*) the view that the preaching was one of condemnation, anticipating the final judgment. (*b*) The view that Christ descended into Hades to deliver the souls of the righteous. (*c*) A modification of this view has found favour with some writers, such as Estius, Bellarmine, Luther, Bengel. They limit the application of St. Peter's words to those who had lived at the time of the Deluge, and they make the preaching one of pardon and deliverance, but, under the influence of the dogma that "there is no repentance in the grave," they assume that the message of the gospel came to those only who turned to God before they sank finally in the mighty waters. Under (2) we find the denial that there is any reference at all to the descent into Hades. Christ went in spirit, not in flesh—*i.e.*, before His incarnation—and preached to the spirits who are now in prison, because they rejected the warnings and teachings of Christ's spirit through Noah.

Vers. 18-22.—*An Exegetical Study.*—In seeking to ascertain the meaning of an obscure passage in any writing, close attention must be given to three things: 1. The exact language of the passage. 2. The manifest teachings of plain portions of the same writing; and 3. The line of thought, if any such be discoverable, in the preceding and succeeding contexts. In the present paper it is proposed, by means of the strict application of these rules, to seek the meaning of this much-discussed passage in the first epistle of St. Peter. There is a distinct line of thought running through both the preceding and succeeding contexts. It can be easily traced up to the passage before us, and, passing over the passage, it can be easily picked up again at its close. This being the case, the natural inference is that that line of thought somehow or other runs through the passage itself, and that a true interpretation of the passage will reveal it. St. Peter has been urging the Christians of the Dispersion to lead holy and beneficent lives. He presents various motives to induce them to live such lives. 1. By so doing they will place themselves under the protection and gracious providence of Almighty God. "For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous," etc. (ver. 12). 2. If they live such lives, few will molest them. "And who is he," etc. (ver. 13). 3. Should they even suffer for such a life, they will be happy. "But and if," etc. (ver. 14). The mention of this possibility leads to a brief digression. Resuming his argument, he maintains that suffering for righteousness ought to bring happiness, because it brings success. "For it is better," etc. All recognise the fact that it is well to suffer for evil-doing; but it is even better, if wills the will of God (mark the condition), to suffer for well-doing. This position he justifies by the experience of Christ. "For Christ also hath once suffered," etc. (ver. 18). Then follows a statement respecting the sufferings of Christ. It is a very suggestive statement, and contains an admirable summary of Christian soteriology. It presents in the briefest form the great features of Christ's redemptive sufferings. They were penal, "for sins"; vicarious, "for the unjust"; propitiatory, "to bring us to God." But the richness and suggestiveness of the passage in the domain of soteriology should not be permitted to prevent a

clear recognition of its place in the apostle's argument. It is not the uniqueness of the sufferings of Christ which the apostle has now specially in mind, but the fact that they were sufferings for well-doing, and as such were wondrously beneficent. We must keep this fact clearly and constantly in mind, if we would follow the apostle in his argument. It is true that actually, as viewed in the light of the accomplishment of God's purpose of redemption, Christ suffered for sins. It is true also that ostensibly, in the light of the judicial sentence under which the extreme measure of these sufferings was inflicted, He suffered for sins; but it is yet true that it was only vicariously that He so suffered. He was personally innocent of all the crimes laid to His charge. His whole life was holy, and His whole work gracious in its purposes and beneficent in its results. And yet He suffered—suffered to the death; but with what result? In its rendering of the apostle's statement in this regard the Authorised Version is very seriously defective. It translates, "Being put to death in the flesh but quickened by the Spirit." It spells "spirit" with a capital S, and so indicates that the thought is, that He was put to death in the flesh, but was made alive again by the Holy Ghost. Thus translated, the passage asserts the facts of Christ's death and revivification, and reveals the agent by whom this latter was effected; but this introduces an idea entirely foreign to the apostle's thought, and states a fact which is wholly irrelevant to his argument. Literally the expression is: "Being put to death in flesh, ἐν σαρκί, but quickened in spirit, ἐν πνεύματι. The contrast is between Christ's physical nature, on the one hand, and His spiritual nature, on the other. His physical life was terminated, but His spiritual life was intensified. And now this assertion is to be substantiated. Then follows the passage which is to be considered in this study. This being the case, it is manifest that whatever may be its specific meaning, the purpose of the passage is to justify the apostle's assertion that the physical death of Christ has resulted in the spiritual quickening of Christ. It is manifest that the only way in which it can be shown that the sufferings of Christ intensified the spiritual life of Christ is by comparison of the vigour of that life prior to His sufferings with its virility subsequently. If such comparison reveals increased vigour subsequently to His sufferings, there comes then the further question, Is this increased vigour the result and reward of these sufferings? By the terms of argument just this is the task which Peter sets himself to accomplish in the passage before us. The passage, literally rendered, reads as follows; "Being put to death, indeed, in flesh, but quickened in spirit; in which, going He preached also to the spirits in prison, disobedient sometime when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, in which few—that is, eight—souls were saved through water; which, in a like figure, now saveth us also, even baptism—not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the stipulation toward God of a good conscience; through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject unto Him. Evidently two things, at least, are here asserted: 1. That the *unembodied* spirit of Christ preached. 2. That those to whom He preached were antediluvian sinners. This much is plain; but when was this preaching done? An increasingly popular answer to this question is substantially this: it was done in the interval between the crucifixion of Christ and His resurrection. A cursory reading of the passage seems to justify this answer, but close attention to his language reveals the fact that the apostle does not specifically designate the time. All he says is that Christ, in His unembodied spirit, preached to the antediluvians,

and that His going to them preceded His preaching to them; but he says nothing directly about the time of His going. It is to be noted, however, that these spirits were disobedient in the days of Noah. He does not say that those to whom Christ, in His unembodied spirit preached, were the spirits of men who were disobedient in the days of Noah. They were spirits who in the days of Noah were disobedient. This would seem to indicate that the preaching was in the days of Noah, and that the disobedience consisted in rejecting it. He further describes those to whom Christ's spirit preached as being spirits in prison. The word is of frequent occurrence in the New Testament, and in thirty-six instances out of forty-seven denotes a place of primitive safe-keeping. Only here, however, and in Rev. xx. 7—where it is applied to Satan—is it used in connection with spiritual beings. The thought seems to be that when the bodies of the antediluvians perished in the Flood, their spirits were put in safe-keeping —"prison"—till the judgment. And now the question is, Was this their condition when Christ's spirit preached to them? The current answer to this question is an affirmative one. Is that answer the true one? In attempting to determine the point, let us remember the third principle of interpretation with which we started. In accordance with it, the right answer must unfold the apostle's argument and manifest conclusiveness. The point the apostle is seeking to establish is that the sufferings of Christ's flesh intensified the power of His spirit. It can only be established by comparison. If this preaching by Christ's spirit to the spirits in prison was to the disembodied spirits of those who perished in the Flood, it must have been preceded by a preaching to these spirits in their embodied condition in the days of Noah. That there was such preaching may be accepted as a historic fact. In Gen. vi. 3 we are told that God said, "My spirit shall not always strive with man." This implies that God's spirit had been striving with man and striving ineffectually. This being the historic fact, it is certainly legitimate to claim that this striving included the preaching of Christ's spirit to the spirits of the antediluvians. This answer, then, meets the first requirement of the apostle's argument. It supplies a first preaching by Christ's spirit to the antediluvians, with which a subsequent preaching can be contrasted. Was there a subsequent preaching? If so, when did it occur, and what were its results? The current interpretation answers the first of these questions also affirmatively, and holds that this second preaching was that described in our passage, and that it occurred in the interval between Christ's crucifixion and His resurrection. Does this meet the requirements of the apostle's argument? It must be remembered that he is seeking to prove that the sufferings of Christ quickened the spirit of Christ. If so, the second preaching must be more effective than the first. In the first instance the mass of the antediluvians were disobedient to the gracious message addressed to them. What evidence does our passage furnish that the preaching to these disembodied and imprisoned spirits by Christ's disembodied spirit was more effectual? It is not necessary to resort to a critical examination of the passage to secure an answer, for the reason that the advocates of this view themselves frankly admit that it furnishes none. "What was the intent of that preaching, and what its effect, is not here revealed; the fact merely is stated." (*Alford*, Greek Testament, *in loco.*) So also Archdeacon Farrar: "Of the effect of the preaching nothing is said." ("Early Christianity," p. 93). This interpretation, then, fails to make clear and conclusive the argument of the apostle, and hence, for that reason alone, if there were no other, is to be rejected. But besides this, the interpretation is liable to another objection. It presents a doctrine not elsewhere found in the writings of St. Peter. More

than this. It teaches a doctrine which seems to be excluded by other plain teachings of the apostle. In his second epistle the apostle refers again to the destruction of the antediluvian world. He does so in connection with two other signal illustrations of the power and justice of God. One of these is the punishment of the fallen angels, and the other the destruction of the cities of the plain. In two of these three cases there was signal illustration of God's grace, as well as of His justice; and hence to both features of His providence attention is called in the general conclusion drawn from a consideration of the whole series of providences. That conclusion is thus expressed: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Peter ii. 9). The Revision renders better: "And to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment." The words "under punishment" are the translation of the present passive participle of the verb "to punish." It means literally "being punished." The thought seems to be that as God's punishment overtook these objects of His wrath, His power grasped them and holds and will hold them in unchanged condition till the Day of Judgment. This is evidently the idea in the expression "in prison." The spirits of these antediluvian sinners remain fixed in the condition in which they were when God's justice overtook them and destroyed their bodies. They are in prison—that is, in the custody, primitive safe-keeping of Divine justice. And there they are to remain until the Day of Judgment. This being the case, there is no room in the theology of St. Peter for a gracious visit to the spirits of the antediluvians on the part of Christ, and an offer to them of salvation. An interpretation, then, which thus explains this passage is to be rejected for the two reasons: 1. That it fails to meet the requirements of the apostle's argument, and 2. That it is at variance with his theology. An interpretation of the passage, meeting all the requirements of the case, is obtainable through identification of this preaching to the spirits with the historical striving of God's spirit with the antediluvian contemporaries of Noah. And such identification is justifiable. 1. It is a historic fact that God's spirit strove with the antediluvians St. Peter here affirms that Christ, in His unembodied spirit preached to their spirits. It is not necessary to suppose that this striving consisted solely of this preaching. It is enough to believe that it included it, and that in his assertion about Christ's preaching St. Peter had reference to it. 2. God's striving with the antediluvians was ineffectual. So, on this assumption, was the preaching of Christ's spirit to their spirits. It is upon this that St. Peter dwells. They were disobedient. In consequence of disobedience they are in prison. The mass of the antediluvians perished. Only eight entered the ark graciously provided for them, and so were saved. 3. The historic reason for the failure of this striving was the fact that God's spirit was unembodied, while the antediluvians were embodied spirits. "My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh" (Gen. vi. 3). Pure spirit cannot successfully strive with incarnated spirit; and hence God will not always attempt it. Man has body as well as spirit, and is to be reached through the senses as well as the perceptions; hence a being must be incarnate in order to successfully influence him. It is worthy of notice that even Satan, the great tempter of mankind, succeeded in seducing our first parents and alienating them from God, only by assuming a physical form, and so enforcing his suggestions to the mind of Eve by appeals to her senses. Now all this is in closest keeping with the apostle's line of thought. He is endeavouring to justify his assertion that Christ's endurance of the extremest degree of physical suffering has resulted in His spiritual quickening. And his proof is furnished by contrast

between the power of the pre-incarnate and the post-incarnate, risen, glorified Christ. 4. The historic failure indicates the line of present and current success. "The like figure whereunto," etc. (ver. 21). Lit. "Which you also the antitype now saves—baptism." In other words, St. Peter affirms that salvation to day through baptism is analogous to—literally, antitypical of——salvation by water through the ark in the days of Noah. It is not likely that St. Peter meant to say that the waters of the Flood were a type of that of baptism in the modern technical sense of the term. In fact, the current theological signification of the term does not seem to be its scriptural one. The word is used but twice in the New Testament—in Heb. ix. 24 and here. In the passage in Hebrews its meaning is clear. The tabernacle to be constructed by Moses was to be a copy—antitype is the word in the original—of that shown him in the mount. So here; the plan of salvation to-day is modelled after that of the days of Noah. This being the case, there is opportunity to contrast the effectiveness of the two plans, and this opportunity St. Peter embraces. But how does he do it in such way as to prove that the sufferings of Christ quickened the spirit of Christ? He does so (1) By declaring that the water of baptism is more graciously effective than the waters of the Flood. The latter saved eight souls; the former is saving you. St. Peter is not exactly mathematical. The number saved in the Flood is historic. He gives that. The number being saved now is known only to God; but no matter. It includes those Christians of the Dispersion. That was enough for them. They were at least greatly more numerous than those in the ark; and yet, however numerous they were, they were being saved by baptismal water. Left unqualified, this declaration of the apostle would inevitably be used to prove the extremest doctrine of baptismal grace; hence he explains that he has reference to real and not to ritual baptism, to the formal and sacramental response of the loyal soul to God, and not the external application of water to the body. (2) By declaring that the efficacy of baptismal water is owing to the resurrection of Christ (ver. 21). But resurrection implies death. The sufferings of Christ, then, as leading to the resurrection of Christ, have wondrously increased the gracious power of Christ. Nor is this all. Not only have the sufferings of Christ wondrously increased the efficacy of His present as compared with His former method of salvation—baptism now saving multitudes while the ark saved but eight; they have also secured for Him wondrously increased facilities for the accomplishment of His purposes of grace. As the risen, triumphant Redeemer, He has gone into heaven, and is now on the right hand of God, and has control of the entire host of heaven, "angels and authorities and powers being subject to Him" (ver. 22). It thus becomes evident that the passage under consideration does present proof of the apostle's assertion that suffering for good, when God's will wills it, is promotion of good. That proof is furnished by the contrasted results of two methods of salvation. Our race has twice been exposed to destruction. Once it was exposed to temporal destruction by a flood. Now it is exposed to eternal ruin by the punishment of sin. In both instances God has sought to avert the peril, and save the race. In the case of the antediluvians He wrought simply as spirit. The effort failed. Now God works upon a different plan. Christ has become incarnate. Having become incarnate, He has suffered and died and risen again. The result is a wondrous increase of His saving power. Of this fact those to whom the apostle wrote were themselves grateful witnesses. In the light, then, of their own experience of the gracious power of their risen Saviour, the apostle urges those to whom he wrote to arm themselves with the same mind, and seek, through similar patience

under sufferings, a like increase of gracious power. "Forasmuch, then, as Christ hath suffered . . . arm yourselves," etc. (iv. 1). Thus interpreted, the passage becomes the logical as well as the textual nexus connecting chap. iii. 7 with chap. iv. 1. Not only so, but as thus interpreted its teaching is in harmony with the analogy of faith, and present no strange or doubtful doctrine for Christian acceptance.—*D. F. Bonner, D.D.*

Vers. 19, 20. *The Disobedient Spirits.*—We can quite understand that there would be much speculation in the Early Church concerning the place and occupation of the spirit of Christ, between the death and the resurrection; and such speculations must fit into the strange and confused notions of the day concerning Hades, the abode of disembodied spirits. It needs to be seen clearly that direct teaching concerning the spirit of man when it is liberated from the body is no part of Divine revelation. The fact of continuity, immortality, is asserted, but there revelation stops. Much is suggested by figures and parables, but even those who had died, and whose human lives were restored for awhile, brought no news whatever of the after life. St. John recognises the blank when he says, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." Absolutely nothing whatever is known concerning the time between Christ's death and resurrection. According to the thought of His day—not according to the Bible, which is silent on the matter—there was a general place of confinement for all disembodied spirits, and speculation divided this general region into two parts; the one, called Paradise, receiving the good, and the other, Gehenna, receiving the bad, and involving them in some kind of torture. The speculations of the Early Church imagined Christ as passing at death into this general region of Hades, and then went on to represent Him as preaching to both those on the Paradise side and those on the Gehenna side; but it should be fully recognised that all this was speculation of men, and not revelation from God. Strangely enough, the floating speculations gained one precise form, and Christ was represented as having preached to the antediluvian sinners; but what He preached, and with what result He preached, the speculators did not declare. These floating speculations were familiar to the early disciples, and were embodied, later on, in the apocryphal work known as the "Gospel of Nicodemus." Now, St. Peter and St. Jude seem to have been very greatly influenced by the speculative and imaginary ideas of their age, and they did not hesitate to use them for strictly *illustrative* purposes in their writings; and St. Peter has in mind the common idea of his time when he thus refers to Christ's preaching to the "spirits in prison." If we take the passage as illustrative, its difficulties are lightened. If we take it as authoritative teaching, its difficulties are overwhelming. There is no other reference in all God's Word to "spirits in prison." And there is no conceivable reason why, if Christ preached to old-world sinners, He should limit Himself to those who lived before, and died in, the Flood. There is simply a passing allusion to the unauthorised talk of the day, in order to introduce the case of Noah as an illustration of the safety and the power that can be gained by persistent suffering for righteousness' sake. Because we, too, persist in speculating concerning the place and condition of disembodied spirits, we so readily grasp at every passing allusion in the New Testament, from which inferences—and they are usually vague, ill-grounded, and worthless—can be drawn. We are strangely unwilling to recognise, what is certainly the fact, that the world to come, the world of spirits, is no subject of Divine revelation; and that concerning the spiritual Being, Christ, we only know, and can only know, what He is in relation to that work of redemption which He has undertaken for the individual and for

the world. The "Larger Hope," the doctrine of "Purgatory," etc., are simply speculations, with more or less ground in inferences from casual expressions of God's Word. What St. Peter teaches is that Jesus was put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit through the resurrection; and in His spiritual life now, angels and authorities and powers—the symbols of all moral and spiritual forces—are made subject to Him, so that He can use them all for carrying through His work in the redemption and sanctification of humanity.

Ver. 20. *The Disobedient Spirits in Prison.*—The "spirits in prison" cannot well mean anything but disembodied souls, under a greater or less degree of condemnation, waiting for their final sentence, and undergoing meanwhile a punishment retributive or corrective. Had the apostle stopped there we might have thought of the preaching of which he speaks as having been addressed to all who were in such a prison. The prison itself may be thought of as a part of Hades contrasted with the Paradise of God, which was opened, as in Luke xxiii. 43; Rev. ii. 7, to the penitent and the faithful. The words that follow, however, appear to limit the range of the preaching within comparatively narrow boundaries. The "spirits" of whom St. Peter speaks were those who had "once been disobedient"; the once being further defined as the time when "the long-suffering of God was waiting in the days of Noah." We naturally ask, as we read the words (1) why the preaching was confined to these; or (2) if the preaching itself was not so confined, why was this the only aspect of it on which the apostle thought fit to dwell? The answer to the first question cannot be given with any confidence. It is behind the veil which we cannot lift. All that we can say is, that the fact thus revealed gives us at least some ground for seeing in it a part of God's dealings with the human race, and that it is not unreasonable to infer an analogous treatment of those who were in an analogous condition. The answer to the second question is, perhaps, to be found in the prominence given to the history of Noah in our Lord's eschatological teaching, as in Matt. xxiv. 37, 38; Luke xvii. 26, 27, and in the manifest impression which that history had made on St. Peter's mind, as seen in his reference to it both here and in 2 Pet. ii. 5, iii. 6. It is a conjecture, but not, I think, an improbable or irreverent one, that the disciple's mind may have been turned by our Lord's words to anxious inquiries as to the destiny of those who had been planting and building, buying and selling, "when the Flood came and took them all away," and that what he now states had been the answer to these inquiries. What was the result of the preaching we are not here told, the apostle's thoughts travelling on rapidly to the symbolic or typical aspect presented by the record of the Flood; but chap. iv. 6 shows that his mind still dwelt upon it, and that he takes it up again, as a dropped thread, in the argument of the epistles. It will be noted, whatever view we may take of the interpretation of the passage as a whole, that it is the disobedience, and not any after repentance at the moment of death, of those who lived in the days of Noah, that is here dwelt on. Such is, it is believed, the natural and true interpretation of St. Peter's words. It finds a confirmation in the teachings of some of the earliest fathers of the Church—in Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, and Athanasius, and Cyril of Alexandria. Even Augustine, at one time, held that the effect of Christ's descent into Hades had been to set free some who were condemned to the torments of hell, and Jerome adopted it without any hesitation. Its acceptance at an early date is attested by the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus, nearly the whole of which is given to a narrative of the triumph of Christ over Hades and Death, who are personified as the potentates of darkness. It tells how He delivered Adam from the

penalty of his sin, and brought the patriarchs from a lower to a higher blessedness, and emptied the prison-house, and set the captives free, and erected the cross in the midst of Hades, that there also it might preach salvation. Legendary and fantastic as the details may be, they testify to the prevalence of a widespread tradition, and that tradition is more naturally referred to the teaching of St. Peter in this passage, as the germ out of which it was developed, than to any other source. As a matter of history, the article, "He descended into hell," *i.e.* into Hades, first appeared in the Apostles' Creed at a time when the tradition was almost universally accepted, and when the words of the Creed could not fail to be associated in men's minds with the hope which it embodied.—*Dean Plumptre.*

Ver. 21. *Noah's Baptism of Suffering.*—It appears to be at once assumed that "baptism" here can only refer to the initial rite of the Christian profession. But there are two things which need to be taken into careful consideration. 1. St. Peter is not in any way dealing with the beginnings of Christian profession, but with the persecutions and troubles which are found always to attend the persistent effort to live the Christian life. In no natural way could any reference to the rite of baptism be suggested to his mind. 2. The term "baptism" is not used only of the initiatory rite; it is employed as a figure for providential dispensations of a disciplinary character, under which men are brought. In Heb. vi. 2 the word is used in the plural, as if it was fully recognised that there were different sorts of baptisms. And St. Peter could not fail to have in cherished memory the figurative words of his Divine Master: "But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke xii. 50). Christ had a disciplinary experience of suffering in well-doing to pass through. And on another occasion St. Peter's Lord had said, "Are ye able to drink the cup that I drink? or to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" evidently, in this figurative way, referring to the experience of suffering that was before Him. In this sense Noah experienced a baptism of suffering in well-doing. Those years of working at the ark, and waiting for the judgment of God, were years of strain and suffering, a time of hard experience, when he was scorned and persecuted by godless neighbours. But he found what Christ found, and what Christ's people always have found, that if they persistently suffer in well-doing they gain the highest power for service, moral and spiritual power; and they are in the special keeping and care of God, and are even permitted to save others. Noah's suffering in well-doing enabled him to preach to the antediluvians—it was preaching to them; it secured his personal safety when the judgment fell, and it brought him the right of saving seven persons beside himself. "Baptism doth now save you." Not the rite of baptism—that does not save anybody: and there would be no point in that applied to Christian disciples who were called to suffer for righteousness' sake. It was their baptism of providential discipline that St. Peter had in mind; and what he would impress on them is, that they must not think of it as merely corrective of evil; it was not designed merely to secure "the putting away of the filth of the flesh." It was sent to give them that kind of spiritual power for witness and service which can only come when a man can suffer, keeping a good conscience. And that is the kind of suffering which brought Christ His unique spiritual power. Job is the Old-Testament illustration of suffering that was not sent for the "putting away of the sins of the flesh," but for that kind of spiritual testing of integrity—of a good conscience—which made Job a witness to the ages of the fact, that disinterested love to God is possible, and such confidence in the Divine wisdom as enables a man to

trust God, though He slays. It is not possible without undue strain to connect the "interrogation of a good conscience toward God" with the resurrection of Christ, so as to think of it as "through the resurrection"; but if we understand the parenthesis to close with the words "conscience toward God," then "through the resurrection" connects with "quickened in the Spirit" of ver. 18, and the two points of St. Peter's persuasion come fully into view. Christ having suffered in well-doing, even unto extremity, even unto death—physical death—has gained a free, large, spiritual power, and the trust of supreme spiritual authority. And St. Peter would urge on these persecuted disciples that they may well endure *their* baptism of suffering for righteousness' sake, in the confidence that it would be over-ruled for sublime issues, and they would be absolutely safe under every form of stress and strain. The apostolic use of Old-Testament illustrations, and the peculiar typical manner in which Old-Testament incidents and characters were treated, is very familiar to the Bible student. It is a manner which the Western mind finds exceedingly difficult to understand or appreciate.

Baptism.—We enter upon this question—whether we have a right to claim to be sons of God or not? And if so, on what grounds? In virtue of a ceremony, or of a certain set of feelings? Or in virtue of an eternal Fact—the fact of God's Paternity.

I. The apparent denial of original sin in asserting the paternity of God. The text declares that baptism *saves* us. But it declares that this can only be said figuratively: "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us." Original sin is an awful fact. It is not the guilt of an ancestor imputed to an innocent descendant, but it is the tendencies of that ancestor living in his offspring, and incurring guilt. Original sin can be forgiven only so far as original sin is removed. He who would deny original sin must contradict all experience in the transmission of qualities. It is plain that the first man must have exerted on his race an influence quite peculiar; that his acts must have biassed their acts. And this bias or tendency is what we call original sin. Now, original sin is just the denial of God's paternity, refusing to live as His children, and saying we are not His children. From this state Christ redeemed. He revealed God as the Father, and as the Spirit who is in man, "lighting every man," moving in man his infinite desires and infinite affections. This was the Revelation. The reception of that revelation is Regeneration. There are two ways in which that revelation may be accepted. 1. By a public recognition called baptism. 2. By faith. "We are saved by faith"; "baptism saves us."

II. But if baptism is only the public recognition and symbol of a fact, is not baptism degraded and made superfluous? 1. Baptism is given as a something to rest upon; nay, as a something without which redemption would soon become unreal; which converts a doctrine into a reality, which realises visibly what is invisible. For our nature is such that immaterial truths are unreal to us until they are embodied in material form. God's character—nay, God Himself—*to us* would be nothing if it were not for the creation, which is the great symbol and sacrament of His presence. So baptism is a fact for man to rest upon, a doctrine realised to flesh and blood. 2. Baptism is the token of a church, of an universal church, not the symbol of a sect. 3. Baptism is an authoritative symbol, but not an arbitrary symbol. The *authoritativeness* is the all in all which converts baptism from a mere ceremony into a sacrament. It is no conventional arrangement; it is valid as a legal, eternal truth, a condensed, embodied fact. Is this making baptism nothing? I should rather say baptism is everything. Take your stand upon the broad, sublime basis of God's Paternity. God created the world—

God redeemed the world. Baptism proclaims separately, personally, by name to you—God created you, God redeemed you. Baptism is your warrant—you *are* His child. And now, because you are His child, live as a child of God; be redeemed from the life of evil which is false to your nature into the life of light and goodness, which is the truth of your being. —*F. W. Robertson.*

Ver. 22. *Christ's Spiritual Rights and Spiritual Powers.*—"Who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him." It is now fully recognised by all thoughtful and intelligent persons that there is a growth and development in the teachings of our Lord's brief ministerial life. That He grew in wisdom during the thirty years of His private life at Nazareth is expressly declared. That He grew in wisdom and apprehension of truth, and spiritual insight and teaching skill, during the three years of practice and experience in active ministry is plain to all who, without prejudice, compare His earlier and later teachings. It is but the affirmation of His true humanity to declare that He grew in the apprehension of His own mystery, and the meaning of His own mission. But however difficult it may be to receive this fact, or even to state it with due precision, limitations, and qualifications, we are on perfectly safe grounds when we say that the apostles grew in the spiritual apprehension of the person of their Lord, the incidents of His career, and the doctrinal mysteries that centred in His person and work. It was long before they really understood their Lord Himself. They accepted Him as the national Messiah. By-and-bye they saw in Him the Son of God, and Saviour from sin. At first they were simply overwhelmed by their Lord's death, which seemed an unendurable disgrace, and an irreparable loss. By-and-bye they saw in it the necessary self-sacrifice of Him who would deliver humanity from sin. At first they could make little or nothing of their Lord's resurrection. It was even more a mystery than a joy. He was with them again, but He was not with them as He had been. And it was a long time before they could fully realise that His presence with them in His spiritual, resurrection, heavenly life was better, every way better, to them than His presence within bodily limitations. Each of the apostles gained some special and characteristic thought of the present mission of the Risen and Living One. It is to one of the thoughts of St. Peter that attention is now directed. It represents what he most deeply felt after he had thought for long years about it. That resurrection brought to Christ the kind of trust—spiritual trust; the kind of power—spiritual power, which God always has given, and always does give, to those who suffer in the flesh for righteousness' sake. And it is a kind of power and trust which can be given on no other conditions, can be attained in no other way. The apostle Paul gives us the same apprehension of the Resurrection in a different form of words. "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death; yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave Him the name which is above every name." And if we put St. Peter's words together without confusing them with his parenthesis, what he says is this: "Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit through His resurrection. Who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him." This is fully intelligible, and this is entirely in harmony with the teaching of the other apostles. In His resurrection life Jesus has gained spiritual power and spiritual authority, and these He is using now in the completing of His great redemptive work for humanity.

Christ has no longer a sphere of redemptive ministry in bodily relations. Christ has now a sphere of redemptive ministry in spiritual relations. For the fulfilment of that spiritual ministry He is entrusted with spiritual rights, and endowed with spiritual powers. On these points we may suggestively and profitably dwell. **Christ has no longer a sphere of redemptive ministry in bodily relations.** Once He had! He came into human spheres that He might deal illustratively with the human physical woes that are attendant upon and illustrative of sin. He could say, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." He could send this message back to the anxiously inquiring Baptist: "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them." But all that illustrative redemptive work in bodily sufferings and disabilities was ended. That was *finished.* That was never to be resumed. Jesus never opened a blind eye, or cleansed a leper, or cast out a devil, during His resurrection life. He was "put to death in the flesh." We see clearly that His cross ended His human life; we need to see as clearly that the cross ended His illustrative redemptive ministry in physical scenes and relations. We shall not properly apprehend what He *does* if we fail to apprehend what He *once did*, but now and for ever has ceased to do. The illustrative redemption is done; the redemption which was illustrated is now being wrought by Him who is quickened in the spirit through His resurrection.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1. *A Wife's Power to Win.*—"As I was conversing," says a writer in the *New York Observer*, "with a pious old man, I inquired what were the means of his conversion. For a moment he paused—I perceived I had touched a tender string. Tears gushed from his eyes, while, with deep emotion, he replied: 'My wife was brought to God some years before myself. I persecuted and abused her because of her religion. She, however, returned nothing but kindness—constantly manifesting an anxiety to promote my comfort and happiness; and it was her amiable conduct when suffering ill-treatment from me that first sent the arrows of conviction to my soul.'"

Ver. 3. *Pride in Dress.*—Goldsmith tells of a mandarin who took much pride in appearing with a number of jewels on every part of his robe. He was once accosted by a sly old fellow, who, following him through several streets, bowed often to the ground, and thanked him for his jewels. "What does the man mean?" cried the mandarin. "I never gave you any of my jewels." "No," replied the other; "but you have let me look at them, and that is all the use you can make of them yourself. So the only difference between us is, that you have the trouble of watching them; and that is an employment I don't much desire."

Ver. 8. *Courtesy.*—The Queen, accompanied by Lady Agnes Duff, was once visiting the fine falls of Corriemulzie. In crossing the high road, which runs between the cottage grounds and the site of the Falls, the party met a drove of cattle coming from the Castleton market. The drover, a fine-looking man from Atholl, addressing Lady Agnes, said, "Please, can you tell me if the Queen is forward to-night?" Her Majesty overheard the question, turned round, and bestowed on the stalwart Highlander a most gracious bow and smile. Sir George Grey then fell back, and told him that it was the Queen who thus bowed to him.

Civility.—When old Zachariah Fox, the great merchant of Liverpool, was asked by what means he had contrived to realise so large a fortune as he possessed, his reply was, "Friend, by one article alone, in which thou mayest deal too if thou pleasest—civility."

Triumphing over Calumniators.—"If any one speaks ill of thee," said Epictetus, "consider whether he has truth on his side; and if so, reform thyself, that his censures may not affect thee." When Anaximander was told that the very boys laughed at his singing, "Ay," said he, "then I must learn to

sing better." Plato, being told that he had many enemies who spoke ill of him, "It is no matter," said he; "I will live so that none shall believe them." Hearing at another time that an intimate friend of his had spoken detractingly of him, "I am sure he would not do it," said he, "if he had not some reason for it." This is the surest as well as the noblest way of drawing the sting out of a reproach, and the true method of preparing a man for that great and only relief against the pains of calumny—*a good conscience.*

Suffering with Christ,—

Wouldst thou inherit life with Christ on high?
Then count the cost, and know
That here on earth below
Thou needs must suffer with thy Lord, and die.
We reach that gain to which all else is loss
But through the cross.

Oh! think what sorrows Christ Himself has known;
The scorn and anguish sore,
The bitter death He bore,
Ere He ascended to His heavenly throne;
And deemest thou thou canst with right complain,
Whate'er thy pain?

Not e'en the sharpest sorrows we can feel,
Nor keenest pangs, we dare
With that great bliss compare,
When God His glory shall in us reveal;
That shall endure when our brief woes are o'er
For evermore! *Simon Dach*, 1640.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CALL TO HOLY LIVING.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1. **In the flesh.**—Or to the flesh; *i.e.*, so far as the flesh is concerned. The same sphere in which Christian disciples were called to suffer. **Same mind.**—Or thought. The same temper of trust, obedience, and submission. Put yourselves into the same disposition. **Ceased from sin.**—"Hath been caused to rest." The moral result of the suffering is deliverance from the motions of sins. But it is suffering borne in the 'mind of Christ' that alone has its full moral power on us. See Rom. vi. 7-11.

Ver. 2. This verse explains the previous verse. Suffering, rightly borne, brings a mood of submission to the will of God, and this involves our deliverance from our own self-will. A man ceases to live unto the lusts, desires, of his own heart, when he comes fully to do and bear God's holy will. ἐπιθυμίαις. All sensual objects, pleasures, profits, honours, which are repugnant to the will of God.

Ver. 3. **Will of the Gentiles.**—Almost satirical, as addressed to *Jews.* It was altogether unworthy of them to take up with the self-indulgent customs of the Gentiles; it was impossible for Jews who had become Christians in any way to keep association with old evil practices. It seems that both Gentiles and bigoted Jews were trying to draw the Christian Jews away from their profession by the enticements of sensual indulgence, and public excitements. If we could understand the state of society in those days, we should readily see how attractive, and how subtle and strong in their influence, those enticements and temptations were, and therefore how needful was the apostolic warning. Those pledged to do the will of Christ must in no sense allow themselves to do the "will of the Gentiles." To us Christ our Master must be *all*, or nothing at all. **Lasciviousness.**—A plural form for all kinds of bodily impurity. **Lusts.**—See above. **Excess of wine.**—A contemptuous word is used—"wine-swillings." Involving loss of due self-restraint. **Revellings.**—Roystering parties. **Banquetings.**—Or carousings; drinking-bouts. **Idolatries.**—With reference to the excitements and immoralities usually associated with idol feast-times. It is evident that licentious Jews had sadly fallen into evil ways, but it is difficult to conceive that the Christian Jews had yielded to such enticements. Perhaps St. Peter only warns them of serious possibilities of temptation.

Ver. 4. **Wherein.**—In regard to which fleshly life. Christians always excite surprise in persisting in separation from carnal indulgences. **Riot.**—Or letting loose of bodily passions. The word used may mean, *sink, slough, puddle.* **Speaking evil of you.**—Slanderously affirming that you are as bad as themselves. Such slander was part of the suffering of the Christians; and they must take care that they gave no conceivable occasion for it.

Ver. 5. **Who.**—That is, these revilers and slanderers. They will surely be called to account

before God. "They who now demand an account, will one day have to render it." St. Peter offers the consideration of God's near judgment, for the comfort and assurance of Christians unjustly slandered. The early disciples thought of Christ's vindication as near at hand. "Hence St. Peter includes the slanderers of his day among the *living*, as just about to be judged" (*Bengel*).

Ver. 6. **Them that are dead.**—Not the souls of the dead; but to those who once were alive, and are now dead; *e.g.*, the men of the age of Noah, to whom reference is made in the preceding chapter. This sentence should help us to understand the preaching to the "spirits in prison." In ver. 5 the "quick" and the "dead" are distinguished. The familiar apostolic meaning is the "dead" *before* Christ's coming, and the "quick" or "alive" *at* Christ's coming. This is the idea of "dead" in this verse. *Alford* thinks those in their graves are meant. **According to men.**—That is, the discipline of life, the common experience of human suffering, was God's gospel preached to them, with a view to their quickening to spiritual life. If they failed to respond, there could be for them but "a fearful looking for of judgment." St. Peter is comforting tempted and tried Christians, by assuring them that their tempters and persecutors are in the hands of God, in the just judgment of God. "Even such as are now dead had the gospel preached to them, with this result, that the common judgment should pass upon them in the flesh, and yet that they should have a higher life before God by the operation of the Spirit" (*W. W.*). "They were judged after the manner of men, by the laws by which all men are judged according to their works; but the purpose of that judgment, like that of the judgments that come upon men in this life, was to rescue them from a final condemnation" (*Plumptre*). Many of the slanderers and persecutors of the Christians would be their personal friends and relatives; and St. Peter would feel it necessary to temper and relieve, as far as possible, his denunciations of them. We all want some ground of hope concerning our unbelieving and ungodly friends.

Ver. 7. **End of all things.**—Jews naturally thought of the end of organised Judaism as the "end of all things." The end of one great *æon*, or dispensation was nigh at hand, and this fact was properly used as an incentive to watchfulness. Man is not capable of attaching a definite meaning to the term, "end of all things." He can understand the "end of *his* things." **Sober.**—Better, "be of sound mind, and be sober unto prayer." Keep a good check on all bodily desires and passions; sober, or self-restrained, and so able to make everything an occasion of prayer.

Ver. 8. **Charity.**—Or love; but it is love as influencing Christian fellowship. Distinguish from the love of sex. Charity suggests the mutual consideration, and mutual service, which are the essential elements of social love. **Fervent.**—Or intense. It is important that the love should be more than cherished good feeling. It should find free expression in daily intercourse. The difficult circumstances of the Churches made mutual confidence, mutual interest, and mutual helpfulness, unusually important. **Cover the (a) multitude.**—See James v. 20. The idea is, that love tries to hide the faults and failings of brethren; or, love others, and you will find it easy to forgive, and pass over faults. "It is a truth from which we need not shrink, that every sin which love hides from man's sight, is hidden in God's sight also" (*Alford*). One writer thinks the idea of the sentence is, that the exercise of this grace of charity, or love, makes up for a great many other shortcomings in the man.

Ver. 9. **Hospitality.**—Suggested by the word "charity," and an important form of it in those days, when Christians were often turned out of their homes, and dependent on the shelter and kindness of Christian friends. **Grudging.**—Murmuring, fretting under the claim put upon you. Circumstances of family life often make offering hospitality a great strain on feeling.

Ver. 10. **The gift.**—Better, *a gift*, any gift. Each renewed man is thought of as being endowed with some gift, which he is to put to use for the general edification. Activity in the employment of our Christian gifts provides the best security against temptation. **Minister.**—In the general sense of "use in service." **Stewards.**—Men put in trust. A steward is in no sense a possessor. **Manifold.**—Various. God's gifts take various forms, and so the whole circle of the Church's need is adequately provided for.

Ver. 11. **Speak.**—Referring to the gift of tongues, which took form as preaching, prophecy, ecstatic utterance, counsel, etc. (See Rom. xii. 6-8; 1 Cor. xii.—xiv). **Oracles of God.**—R.V. "*speaking* as it were oracles of God." Two ideas are suggested, but the latter is probably the one in the apostle's mind. 1. Speaking in harmony with what was already received as oracles of God; or, 2. Speaking only as inspired by oracles of God. The teacher is to keep himself strictly open to Divine leadings; to speak as one possessed of powers not his own. **Minister.**—Serve in the Church as the first deacons did. "Serve tables." General helping in meeting the various claims and duties, perhaps with special reference to the poor. There is a gift of practical ministry to which attention should be directed. **God giveth.** It makes all the difference whether we are using *our* strength, or a *God-given* strength. The gift of working for others comes from God. **Glorified.**—Compare Matt. v. 16; 1 Cor. x. 31. **Praise.**—Glory. **Ever and ever.**—Ages and ages.

Ver. 12. **Strange.**—Do not be surprised, as if something unreasonable had happened. No form of suffering can come to Christians as accident. God, with a purpose of grace, is behind all. **Fiery trial.**—Burning fire. R.V. "among you, which cometh upon you to prove you." Whether "fiery" is intimation of intensity, or strictly descriptive, does not appear. The word as a symbol is more probable. Martyrdoms by fire may not have begun so early.

Ver. 13. **Rejoice.**—In one point of view of the sufferings, they bring you into the experience which led to the sanctifying and glorifying of Christ. It will lead through to yours also. **Inasmuch as.**—Better, "in as far as." We get the true blessing of affliction only so far as we enter into the mind of the suffering Christ.

Ver. 14. **If ye be.**—This form of expression hints that they *had been, were*, and *might be*. Slander and reproach are often harder to bear than suffering in body or in circumstance. **Spirit of glory.**—"Of glory and of power and of God." The spirit which marks you out as an heir of glory. "The argument is, that reproach for the name of Christ is a proof of glory in reserve, or rather, already belonging to the man." **On their part.**—This closing part of the verse is omitted in R.V. The words are an undoubted interpolation. They are not found in the best MSS. and Versions (see "Variorum Bible.").

Ver. 15. The word translated "busy-body" is a peculiar one, and seems to have been coined by St. Peter,—ἀλλοτριοεπίσκοπος—lit. "Bishops of other men's matters," claiming rights in matters with which he has no proper concern. Interference is a fruitful source of trouble in all religious, as well as other communities.

Ver. 16. **Christian.**—St. Peter recognises this as the known name of the sect. This fact helps to date the epistle. **On this behalf.**—In this matter, or in this name; in being "counted worthy to suffer in this name."

Ver. 17. **Judgment must begin.**—Compare vers. 5, 7. "Just about to begin." **House of God.**—See 1 Tim. iii. 15; 1 Pet. ii. 5. **End be.**—Not the final doom, but the end of the judgment dispensations that St. Peter knew were about to begin.

Ver. 18. **Scarcely.**—With difficulty. Keep association with the calamities immediately coming, which would centre round the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. Apostles thought of this as God's judgment on the wicked. Illustrate by the singing of the Christians, headed by Olynthus, when the fires of Vesuvius were destroying Pompeii, as given by Bulwer Lytton:

> "Woe to the proud ones who defy Him;
> Woe to the wicked who deny Him;
> Woe to the wicked, woe!"

Ver. 19. **According to the will of God.**—Recognised as permitting, over-ruling, and even apportioning, our suffering lot. Suffering borne for God is sanctified by God. "Stress is laid upon the attribute, or act of creation, as the ground of confidence. He who made the soul is also He who hateth nothing that He hath made."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—6.

Suffering in the Flesh as Help to Ceasing from Sin.—It will be seen how directly adapted, pointed, and practical, St. Peter's teachings are. They apply precisely to the conditions, sufferings, and temptations of the brethren of the "Dispersion," to whom the epistle is addressed. St. Peter has not the interest in theology which characterises St. Paul, and he should not be studied in order to find settings of doctrinal truth. His supreme interest is in Christian living, and in truths only so far as they may inspire and guide godly living. And in this epistle he is mainly concerned with the hindrances to Christian living which come from the disabilities and distresses which making a Christian profession then involved. He looks at the sufferings of the brethren from different points of view, and from every point of view he finds encouragement by showing that they always "work together for good." Here his point of view is the peril occasioned by having to live in the very midst of a licentious Gentile society—a peril all the greater because they once indulged in the unrestrained and degrading customs of Gentile life, and there was some affinity for such things left in their fleshly nature. And he reminds them that suffering in the flesh was the very thing to deliver them from the power of these evils, the very thing to work the very last relics of these things out of their natures, and enable them to cease altogether from sin.

I. **Christ's example of suffering in the flesh.**—What was the point of that example? What was the power that sustained Him? And what were the results of His endurance? It was distinctly and precisely such suffering as we have to undergo, suffering in the fleshly, human sphere; bodily and mental suffering, arising from conditions similar to ours; bodily states, sensibilities, oppositions of evil men, etc. It is only too easy to represent Christ as so unique a Being that we cannot see in His any likeness to our own bodily, fleshly sufferings. He was "in all points" tested, disciplined by suffering, even as we are. St. John vigorously pleads for the truth that Christ is "come in the flesh"; St. Peter vigorously pleads for the truth that Christ "suffered in the flesh." As to the power which sustained Him under the suffering, we have to see that the grace of God rested upon Him as it rests upon us; but beside that, and as the special point of interest now, Jesus was sustained—as we may be, and ought to be sustained—by His full loyalty and devotion to God, and absolute resolve to serve Him in righteousness and well-doing, whatever that might involve. And as to the result, it may be said that, in entire consecration to God, to righteousness as God's will, is always found the deliverance of a man from the "motions of sins in his members." Sin is essentially self-centredness, self-seeking; and a man ceases from self-willedness and sin when he gives himself wholly over, in devotion and service to another. Christ absolutely ceased from the service of self, because He was entirely absorbed in the service of the Father.

II. **Deliverance and elevation may come to Christians through their suffering in the flesh** (vers. 2, 3).—The acceptance of bodily suffering in doing what we know to be right, and the will of God, is the sign of the highest moral triumph, of deliverance from the self. It lifts a man right up above the plane in which men seek their own pleasures, and indulge their own lusts and passions. To be willing to suffer for righteousness' sake is proof of self-mastery. No man ever chooses suffering, or submits easily to it, save under the persuasion of some high and holy motive. Illustration may be taken from the case present to the mind of St. Peter. These Christians once had shared in the self-indulgent and demoralising Pagan life around them. On principle they had separated themselves from it all. But the separation was putting them under disability, and causing them suffering. Their loyalty to principle was severely tested, but if they held fast their loyalty, and patiently bore their sufferings, they would surely find that this would perfect the separation, and make it easy to stand quite aloof from every evil feature of the old Pagan life. It is the point which may be set in adaptation to the circumstances of every age. In the earnestness of the Christian life—and earnestness is effectively shown in willingness to endure—lies the true safety from surrounding evils, howsoever they may appeal to the fleshly nature.

III. **The misunderstanding those must expect who are willing to suffer in the flesh** (ver. 4).—"Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot; speaking evil of you." The early Christians were, in a remarkable way, exposed to slander and misrepresentation; and these are often harder to bear than actual persecutions affecting body and circumstances. A Christian who is indifferent concerning material things is intensely jealous concerning his good name, because the honour of his Lord is bound up in his keeping his good name. But even this he must be willing to bear; by his persistency in good and gracious living "putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men." A Christian has always this effective power against the slanderer he can *live* so that no one can by any possibility credit the slanders. He can live so as to stand in the acceptance of the righteous God, and so as fearlessly to anticipate the time when human lives must be appraised and judged. The apostles, with their anticipation of the immediate return of Christ for judgment,

constantly urge that whatever benefits accrue to the faithful will be shared by the Christians who have died before He comes, as well as by those who are alive when He comes. As they contemplated material blessings from the coming, it was necessary to show that those who had died before He came would be placed under no disability. St. Peter in no way refers, in ver. 6, to old-world sinners, but entirely to the Christians who had suffered in well-doing right up to death. The gospel—this same gospel of suffering with Christ, and in His spirit—was preached unto them (see Matt. v. 10-12). They were misunderstood, judged, persecuted by men in their fleshly life. But in their loyalty and faithfulness they lived their spiritual life; in their spirits—their inner spiritual life—they kept true to God, and the will of God, as they knew it. And their being dead would prove no hindrance to their sharing the full Divine acceptance with the loyal living, and with Christ, who in the same way "suffered in the flesh."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 1. *Suffering in the Flesh.*—A key to the passage is found in the fact that it is addressed to martyrs and prospective martyrs, and through them to all sufferers of bodily woes. Willingness to suffer is the sign of ceasing from sin, the essence of sin being our living according to our self-will, and unto our self-pleasing. Willingness to suffer was a sign of Christ's life to the will of God, and death to self-will. He was willing to suffer even to extremity, even unto death. That mind of willingness was Christ's defence and power, and it may be ours. Christ presents the example of putting the body under restraint by the dominion of the will or spirit. His suffering in the flesh was *for us*, as an example and power upon us. Take these points: 1. Christ's experience of suffering in the flesh. 2. In what senses this suffering was borne *for us*. 3. How the mastery of the flesh—which takes such a diversity of forms—can be regarded as one great battle. 4. What are the two possible laws under the control of which human lives can be conducted—the will of God or the will of the flesh? 5. How altogether inconsistent a fleshly life must be to a Christian, seeing he is a regenerate man and born unto God. *Paraphrase.* "As Christ suffered in the flesh without shrinking, take for your protection and support the same thought which proved a protection and support to Him—viz., that to be rid of sin for ever was the greatest of all possible blessings, and that this is only attainable through the bodily death. And the result of embracing this thought will be that for the rest of your lives on earth (so soon, perhaps, to be cut violently short) you may no longer live to men's lusts, but to God's will."—*Ellicott's Commentary.*

Christ's Sufferings.—The Redeemer of the world is infinitely above us, and in another sense actually beside us. We adore Him as King of angels, and love Him as our Elder Brother. His sympathy is as true as His sovereignty; and because He once suffered being tempted, He is able now to succour them that are tempted. His incarnation was necessary. The suffering humanity of our Lord is the point where we may touch Him. He was a real man, living, sensitive, suffering, sympathetic, and such a Saviour became us. To see His footprints in the path we have to tread inspires us with willingness to endure to the end.

I. **Try to understand what the sufferings of Jesus Christ were.**—There is a mystery about His sufferings which even far-seeing angels cannot discover. Let reverence walk hand in hand with study. 1. *There can be no doubt that Jesus was exempted from many of the physical ills from which we suffer.* He was healthy, vigorous, with life replete. Many of our physical sufferings we bring on ourselves.

Jesus suffered as a man, but not as a sinner. His whole life was a martyrdom. The pure amongst the impure. 2. *His utter loneliness.* His was the solitude of a holy soul surrounded by sinners; of a heavenly spirit in contact with things earthly and sensual; of a mind whose higher thoughts not a single being on earth could appreciate; whose truest objects in living and dying as He did none could comprehend. 3. *The expression "in the flesh" reminds us of His uncongenial surroundings.* The environment of our life has much to do with our happiness or misery. He lived and died among a despised people. At any moment He might have left the world to its sins and sorrows, and risen triumphant above them all. Then He could not have been our Brother, our Great High Priest. Jesus is our Example.

II. **How these sufferings were endured by Him.**—1. *It is evident that He accepted them as God's appointment for Him here.* "The cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" indicates His attitude to trouble right through. It was a "cup" measured and proffered by the Father's hand—a Father whose will was wise and good. The secret of patient, brave endurance of the ills of life is that God rules them, and in the long run will bring Divine issues out of them, as He did out of Gethsemane and Calvary. 2. *Our Lord never allows Himself to be absorbed in His own sorrows.* Suffering tends to make us self-absorbed. No selfishness in Jesus. He was always ready to enter into other people's joys and griefs, whatever His own sorrows might be. If a follower of Christ, our couch of pain will be the centre of joy and peace to those who circle round us. Effort for others shall mitigate our own distress. "Arm yourselves also with the same mind."

III. **How can we do this?**—1. *By God's help in answer to prayer.* We must set Christ before us as our Pattern. A living example is more helpful than abstract principles. Keep Jesus steadily before you. 2. *Jesus is no historic personage, but a Living Presence.* "I am with you alway." 3. *He identifies Himself with us.* If we suffer with Him, we shall be also glorified together. Trials of faith and patience and temper are not purposeless. Nothing in all this multitudinous world walks with aimless feet. The end of His pathway was not Calvary but heaven. Those who follow it will find at last, not a plunge into an abyss, but a path of ascension to realms sorrowless and sinless, which He entered and claimed for us when He ascended on high and a cloud received Him out of His servants' sight.—*A. Rowland, LL.B., B.A.*

Vers. 1, 2. *The Mind of Christ the Christian's Armour.*—The ruling thought of the text is this: You may be persecuted, you may even be martyred; you may have much to suffer in your flesh, in your circumstances; but so had Christ. You may escape it all by giving up your allegiance to Christ. Live to yourself and to your own self-will, to the indulgence of your own love of ease and safety, and then you need not thus "suffer in the flesh." But if you have the same mind as Christ, if you are determined to set the will of God first, and bear whatever doing that "will" may involve, then you will find yourself lifted up in spirit so as to look cheerfully on to suffering, even to martyrdom, and you will feel that *self-will*—the essence of sin—has ceased; it is crushed within you. Christ's "suffering in the flesh" specially directs our thought to the physical sufferings of the cross. It was from those physical pains that His human nature shrank, and in Gethsemane He triumphed over that shrinking, and won the victory of a perfect and submissive trust in His Father's will. He suffered, yielding His body to the great and prolonged agony, but able to bear it all calmly unto the end, because the *self*—the essence of sin—was quite mastered, and He could say, "Thy will be done." "Arm yourselves with the same mind." Christ

was defended from yielding to bodily suffering, defended, too, from human shrinking from it, by a certain intent, thought, purpose, resolution, which may be sharply expressed in this way: "I shall do and bear the will of God, whatever it may have in it." *We* can have that mind. Prospective suffering will show whether we have it. Actual suffering will test its power and influence on us. "Ceased from sin." Understand "sin" here to stand for that which is the essence of sin, self-will, self-pleasing, and the sentence becomes clearer. Live to do the will of God. Set that first, and you will surely find that you become dead to self; you cease from sinful shrinking back; nay, the actual suffering will but help to kill the self in you. The mind of Christ then will arm us for the battle and suffering of life.

I. **What is that mind?**—Like the early Christians, we find that in the Christian lot there is the "needs be" for what answers to their persecutions and martyrdoms. And we cannot control our circumstances. "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will." Indeed, no man can master his circumstances until he has mastered himself; but then, even if he never can alter the things, he can alter the set and tone of his mind and feeling towards the things, and mate and master them thus. For, after all, the various things of life are to men according to their mind and feeling towards them. Things hurt us in one mood of mind which we do not at all feel in another; and by differences of disposition men's troubles vary. The one most impressive of all lessons learned from the human life of the Lord Jesus is this: He could not change His circumstances or surroundings; He would not have done so if He could; and yet He really mastered them all by the inward feeling and purpose of submission and obedience which He so fully cherished. Nothing can master the disabilities of a human life but soul-strength; nothing can give and keep soul-strength save the simple, cheerful determination that everywhere and in everything we will do and bear God's will. Here is the answer to the question, What shall arm us for the battle and sorrow of life? It is "the mind of Christ," the set of soul towards God, and so towards holy things, which was characteristic of Christ. Can we yet more fully see what that prevailing mind and purpose of Christ was? Look at His childhood. There we often find the foreshadowings of the life; and in such a child as Jesus we may well expect to see the prophecy of the life. The thought evidently abiding in Him was this: Life for Me is My Father's business. He began with something in His mind—with an idea and a resolution that lifted Him above the thought of suffering. Upon our Lord, during His ministry, there came awful visions of the woe awaiting Him in the Holy City, and He plainly saw, at the centre of all that woe, the agonising cross; and yet, what was His mind? It is revealed at once in this: "He set His face steadfastly towards Jerusalem." Strong to go forward, even into the mists and the darkness, because He must simply do God's will. Gethsemane is the place where the mind of Christ is so fully revealed. It was Calvary without the bodily pain. There came upon the frail and worn human nature of our Lord the full vision of the awful scenes of the next day, and that human nature cried out in its shrinking, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." But quickly after it comes the triumph-cry of the soul's set purpose: "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." That is the mind of Christ which armed Him for all bearing work. And He was victorious right to the end. The last words that broke from His dying lips showed how thoroughly He had ceased from sin; He was dead to all self-will, all self-seeking—"Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Get that spirit or mind of Christ. Be like Him, and it will not be hard to live the rest of life in the flesh, not to the

lusts of men, not to the self-seekings of our own hearts, but to the will of God.

II. **How may this mind be gained?**—Christ's suffering *in the flesh* was intended to bring closely home to us His kinship with us. Suffering is the common lot of humanity. However we separate Christ from us in His Divine nature, we must keep Him quite near in His human nature. We cannot be like Him in *degree*, we can be in *kind*. How can the mind of Christ be gained? We must have the same thought of *God* that Christ had. That only comes out of personal relations. We must have the same thought of *self* that Christ had. Self second, God first. We must have the same thought of *life* that Christ had. Life, the sphere of God's mission. We must have the same thought of *suffering* that Christ had. The testing of the full obedience and trust.

III. **How will this "mind" practically help us?**—See how it will make us soul-strong (1) in cases of bodily depression; (2) in those changes that involve suffering; (3) in perplexed, anxious times; (4) when called to part with beloved friends. We might cover all human woes, and show how the medicine for all is the "mind of Christ"; we shall only cease from self as we can get it. It is the uplifted face of the Son to the Father, and the trembling cry from the bitter cross—"As Thou wilt." But neither Christ, nor we, can ever feel it, or ever say it, until our souls get a vision of the Father's hands. All is well then. We can suffer and be strong.

Ver. 6. *Preaching to the Dead.*—Having just spoken of Christ as the judge of the living and the dead, he now affirms that the dead—those who are now dead—will be judged according to men in the flesh; that is, as those now living will be judged. But to those now living the gospel has been preached. They have heard of the redemption provided for them in Christ Jesus, and have, therefore, been placed in the most favourable circumstances for preparing for the judgment, and escaping final condemnation. Is this the case also with the dead? with the heathen world, who, indeed, ran to all kinds of excess in sin, but never had the light of revelation? The apostle answers in the affirmative, for the gospel was preached to them also; for when Christ, in His disembodied spirit, went into Hades, He proclaimed to them the good tidings of salvation, and offered to them deliverance from their prison, and a title to eternal life. St. Peter goes back to the former passage (chap. iii. 18), and re-affirms the fact of Christ's preaching to the inhabitants of the unseen world; and further, he affirms the object of the preaching, that they, being judged as having merited death, might, notwithstanding, live as regards the spirit. St. Paul affirms, "The body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness" (Rom. viii. 10), meaning that the body, even of a Christian, dies on account of sin, but that the spirit lives because of the righteousness it has obtained through Christ. Even so have all past generations died, whilst the antediluvians especially, and others who died in a state of alienation from God, were judged to imprisonment in Hades, until Christ came and offered them salvation. If any of them accepted it—and perhaps many of them did—they already live in the spirit, having entered upon a state of blessedness which Christ prepared even for them.—*Thornley Smith.*

The Dead and the Living.—The dead here, contrasted with the living, must naturally mean those who were in the state of the dead when this message came to them. It sounds like an unexpected and mysterious extension of the gospel message, so that not living men alone, but the departed also, came directly within the range of its proclamation. The change was to affect their state, not in the sight of men but of God alone. The men in the days of Noah, the dwellers in the cities of the

plain, the Egyptian host, the Canaanite armies, to the eye of men were all swept away in one indiscriminate judgment. Yet in each case there may have been a secret and powerful work of repentance, by which a remnant turned to God in the hour of calamity and desolation. To all such the message of mercy might come, when our Lord, in His separate spirit, preached to the dead, to the spirits in prison; and the destined result was attained, "that they might live according to God in the spirit," or gain a firm hold of that Saviour and His finished sacrifice, on whom, as the promised seed of the woman, with a dim and starlight faith they had learned to put their trust in the hour of judgment, when all their refuges of lies were swept away.—*Birks.*

Alive and Dead.—The remarkable expression used by St. Paul in 2 Thess. iv. 15, "We that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep," indicates a prevailing sentiment in the early Church which materially helps in the understanding of this difficult verse. When the visible coming of Christ was daily expected, those seemed to be placed at grave disadvantage who were taken away by death before He came. In this way Christians mourned over their dead fellow-Christians, as having missed the great Christian hope and privilege. St. Peter intends to comfort such distressed souls. He is speaking of dead *Christians* and living *Christians*. He bids the troubled ones be quite sure that as the gospel was preached to their dead friends, and they found the eternal life through it, they do live, according to God's thought for them, that very spiritual life into which we all are to be brought at Christ's coming, though, in the ordering of God's providence, they had died. The mistakes in apprehending both this and the previous passage arise from our putting our modern ideas into St. Peter's mind, instead of simply endeavouring to discover what actually was in his mind.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—11.

Immediate Duty in Relation to Christian Graces and Christian Gifts.—As the apostle is directly addressing persecuted and imperilled Christians—men whose lives were in danger on account of their steadfast loyalty to Christ—we must understand him as adapting his persuasions to their particular thoughts and fears. There is an end to all things. There is an end to suffering in the flesh. That end may be martyrdom—it is in some cases. That end may be death—it is in all cases; and the uncertainty of death is a constant persuasion to energy and persistency. "Be ye always ready." It may be true that the early Christians anticipated the end of their sufferings in Christ's coming rather than in death, and that we have learned to see death as Christ's coming; but the fact remains, whatever may be the forms under which it is presented, that whosoever suffers in well-doing, suffers but for a time, and he never knows any day how near the end of his sufferings may be. He may find cheer in the thought of that uncertainty. He may be inspired to do and suffer well by that uncertainty. He ought to be full of supreme anxiety to make the very best of the "little while" of possibilities that is given to him. St. Peter urges upon these persecuted Christians that they ought to be—

I. **Nourishing all Christian graces.**—The moderation of a careful self-restraint and self-management needs to be cultivated and exercised. "Be ye therefore sober." The term implies the harmony of affections and desires with reason, and the due control of passions. Perhaps the idea prominent in the apostle's mind was that the last days—as he imagined them to be—would be full of com-

motions, surprises, and calamities, occasioning great alarm and distress. It should be characteristic of the Christians that they preserved their calmness at such times, "in their patience possessing their souls." Watchfulness of themselves should be joined with prayer. Lit. "be sober unto prayers" (προσευχάς). Recalling our Lord's words in Gethsemane, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." "Men are to be sober with a view to prayer. Desires of all kinds, above all, those of man's lower nature, are fatal to the energy, and therefore to the efficacy, of prayer." "There can be no preparation for the duty of prayer when the mind is *absorbed* either in the pursuit of pleasure or in the pursuit of riches, or even in the pursuit of the arts and sciences. He only can bow the knee in a right spirit, and hold real fellowship with God, who is able to throw off all temporal affairs like a loose garment, and, free from distracting thoughts, at once address himself to his Father who is in heaven." The grace of which Christians in all ages need to be most anxious, the grace which they should most diligently and experimentally cultivate, is the grace of *charity*, using that term in the sense of love to another finding daily expression in service one of another. "And above all things—as the chief and all-essential thing—having your love toward one another intense, because love covereth a multitude of sins." There was special need of cultivating this mutual patience and sympathy and helpfulness of brotherly love in times of peril and persecution. It is an important point of St. Peter's advice that he sees in this cultivated and freely exercised brotherly love the one thing that can master the misunderstandings, and prejudices, and estrangements that inevitably come up in all associations of frail and imperfect men. Christian love can cover, correct, or remove these evils. Hospitality is a Christian virtue which at a peculiar time, and under particular circumstances, found befitting expression for the brotherly love. Jewish Christians scattered abroad would be very dependent on the kindness of Jewish Christians in the countries they visited, or resided in. Hospitality is still a Christian grace that should be cultivated and exercised, but it must find expression within the limitations and conditions of modern civilised life.

II. **Exercising all Christian gifts.**—"According as each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." The apostles thought of the bestowment and sealing of the Holy Ghost as including the imparting to the believer of some special gift, or ability, which he was to use for the edification of his fellow-believers. Every converted man is an endowed man, placed under the responsibility of a trust. His gift is nothing for him to glory in or boast over, it is his possibility of service; whatever it is, it is to be cultured into efficiency, and exercised with all wisdom, prudence, and energy. "All gifts involve reponsibilities, yet it is an honour to possess them, and if we have also grace to employ them aright, they will be doubled to us in a future life." The gifts are classified by St. Peter under two heads—1. Speaking gifts. 2. Ministering gifts. Gifts relating to the tongue. Gifts relating to the hand, or visiting the sick and needy, teaching children, helping those in trouble, etc. And in exercising our gifts it is important to be reminded that there is no absolute standard by which the exercise must be judged; each must minister his own gifts, in his own way, "as of the ability that God giveth." No man of them must judge his brother. This supreme anxiety should possess them all, that they should not serve themselves in the use of their gift, nor even serve others only; they must keep, as the one inspiring idea in the exercise of all gifts, that they should glorify God through Jesus Christ, whose name they bore, and whose servants they were. "We are often actuated in our Church life by personal motives, seeking our own honour, and anxious to obtain the praise of men; and sometimes we are actuated by mixed motives, having God's glory

partly in view, but not losing sight of our own. When our motives are thoroughly purified, and we learn to live and act only for the Divine glory, how lofty will be our piety, and how transparent our character and our lives" (*Thornley Smith*).

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 7. *The End Then and the End Now.*—1. In what sense was it true then, that "the end of all things was at hand"? In the widest and most literal sense that the expression will bear, it was not true, for upwards of eighteen centuries have passed away, and the end has not yet come. "Of that day and hour knoweth no man." The *precise period* of the final judgment was one of those mysteries which even St. John, in the Apocalypse, did not unfold. Is it surprising, then, if the apostle supposed that the end of all things was nearer than it really was? Some think he referred to the end of that age—to the end of the Jewish dispensation. Some think he meant the end of all *these* things is at hand—the follies of the wicked, and the persecutions of the righteous. Death would soon put an end to both, and all would soon be called before the Judge. 2. In what sense is it true now? We are living in the nineteenth century of the Christian era; is the end of it approaching? or is *an* end of the present dispensation near? Some interpreters of prophecy believe that the manifestation of Christ from heaven is at hand, when He will raise the bodies of the sainted dead, change those that are alive, and commence His millennial reign on the earth. The conception is a grand one, and possibly it may be realised; but the personal reign of Christ *on the earth*, as the earth is at present constituted, is difficult to imagine; nor does the language of any of the apostles teach it. When He comes the saints are to be caught up to meet Him *in the air*, and they are to live and reign with Him a thousand years; but it is nowhere said that this will be *on the earth*. We cannot, however, affirm positively that these events are nigh.—*Thornley Smith.*

Watching for the Advent.—It must be held as a first principle that, ever since the appearing of Christ, there is nothing left to the faithful but, with wakeful minds, to be always intent on His second advent.—*Calvin.*

Ver. 7. *The End of All Things.*—Respecting the transactions of the last day, many entertain the view that a moment will come when the present order of things will abruptly terminate, to be followed by a general destruction of the present material order. The prophetic language used in reference to those transactions, and the poetic garb in which they are couched, have tended to nourish such a conception; but the true end of things is not an abrupt suspension of their functions, but a completion—a perfect finish—of the ideal purposes for which these materials were created. Moral ends are the highest ideals of all things and all beings. To their fulfilment we must look for the *terminus* of the railway of time, and not exclusively to their physical constitution, although the movement may be conterminous in both. Human life is the highest of all purposes, and fitted to accomplish the highest and most definite ends. Its course has run for thousands of years, but, having regard to the regeneration of the whole race, we do not see the end of the present order very near. Nevertheless, it is certain, and the fact must have its place among the subjects of contemplation. If, however, we think of the duration of human life, and the uncertainty thereof, to us the "end of all things is at hand." When this life is over, it will be like the final dissolution of the universe: we shall have none of the present interest in it. Our course will soon be at an end. There is but a step between

us and the grave. The contemplation of such a serious step demands soberness, with watching and prayer. "Be ye ready," is the Master's call; to which we ought to answer, *Ready, Lord.*

I. **A grave crisis.**—"The end of all things is at hand." There is a *terminus* in view towards which all things converge. There are no such things as "eternal rounds" for finite creatures, but one straight course, with a sharply defined beginning and ending. In order to take a general view of the subject, we notice four particulars or departments of God's works which are daily moving towards a *finale.* 1. *Human life.* The contemplation of the end of our present life ought to cause no regret. Time and facilities enough will be granted to every man to work out the ideal manhood on which his whole life is based. Time wasted, and circumstances frittered away, will cause sorrow; but the improvement of time and the right use of opportunities will bear a peaceable fruit. Life is a germ, to be developed day by day, and when Death puts in the sickle, the abundant harvest should amply repay the trouble of sowing. He who builds up character according to the Divine model will lay in heaven the topmost stone, with "grace, grace unto it." It is necessary to keep the end in view, to avoid the waste of time and the abuse of talent. A life in earnest will bring death in peace. 2. *Moral means.* Within a definite period, either long or short, the foundations of faith must be laid, obedience to God rendered, service to mankind given, and a general assimilation of purpose to the nature and tendency of the gospel made. It is a great work, and must be accomplished within its own period. It is true that we cannot comprehend eternity, or know all the ultimate purposes of God; but those who have abundant opportunities for repentance and faith now, cannot expect a period of probation hereafter. The offer of mercy through Jesus Christ is made within its own term, and the gospel will utter its *last* word to every sinner in this world. Are there more effective means beyond death—means that will be more certain to produce reformation? In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus there are these words: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rise from the dead." Take a more emphatic answer from the parable of the barren fig-tree: "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it; and if it bear fruit thenceforth, *well*; but if not, thou shalt cut it down." There is a time set, and means ordained for securing the peace of God, and our obvious duty is to "take the tide at the flood." 3. *The course of nature.* The heavens and the earth shall pass away. There are material evidences to show this. We do not build our faith on scientific truths, but we receive them in corroboration of the teaching of the Book. Nature's course, though long, is terminable. Suns, moons, stars, and the earth will one day declare, *We have finished our task.* A graphic description of that day is given by St. Peter in the second epistle and the third chapter. After reading these words, the one impression left on our mind is, that the eternal God has created all things for definite purposes in connection with the life and salvation of the human race; and the call is to prayer and to diligence. 4. *Moral administration.* The course of sin will be arrested, and every discordant note will cease. To-day, sin meets with a series of checks, but then, a complete annihilation. This will necessitate a change in many departments of moral government. The mediation of the Saviour will cease in its intercessory character. The day of forgiveness will end. The unclean will remain so, and the regenerate will rise to a state of perfection. The whole gospel dispensation will advance from its preparatory stages to the final condition of harmony and beauty in God the Father. This will take place after the resurrection and the last judgment. "And when all things have been subjected unto Him, then shall the Son also

himself be subjected to Him that did subject all things unto Him, that God may be all in all." Seeing that things, material and moral, are working towards that grave crisis, we ought to awake out of sleep, for our salvation is nearer than when we believed.

II. **An earnest exhortation.**—"Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." The end must be in view, that the means appointed for its attainment may find a legitimate place in the economy of human life. This reminds us of a motto which a gentleman had inscribed over every door in his house: "Whatever you do, consider the end." 1. *Seriousness.* To be sober-minded is to look at human life in all its bearings and responsibilities. Men are liable to several kinds of intoxication, and there are many drunken, but not with alcohol. Some are intoxicated with pride, others with pleasure, others with wealth, and many with imaginary greatness. St. Peter exhorts us in the text to avoid frivolity. Trifling with serious matters is a grave offence against morality, as well as an injury to the soul. 2. *Watchfulness.* Care must be taken to conserve the good we possess, and to entrench ourselves firmly in every position we occupy. There must be no "unguarded hours" in the Christian's year. There may be enough courage to fight sin in open battle, where there is not enough caution to retain the advantage. Our Saviour exhorts us to "watch and pray." The roaring lion is about, seeking us for his prey. Watchfulness is the compass by which the vessel is steered. Thousands have made a shipwreck of the faith because they neglected to look at the compass. Let us watch our very thoughts, fearing they should be vain. Let us watch every emotion of the heart, fearing they are sinful. Let us watch every step of the foot, fearing it may be outside the narrow path. Watch all your moments, and at all times. Temptation is your greatest foe; watch against your besetting sin. Keep yourselves spotless from the world. "Love not the world, nor," etc. 3. *Prayerfulness.* The aspirations of prayer are heavenward. God has promised to help us. Prayer leads on to the grand end of moral perfection and eternal joy. "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end" (Heb. iii. 14). Then *pray on.* Many of you may look with fear to the end. You are not confident that yours will be peace and joy. It may be that such a blessed assurance is not given to most of the saints until the time comes. But one thing is certain: we must pray on. Prayer leads the way. We enter on holiness by prayer. We secure every blessing by prayer, because we take the name of Jesus with us to the throne of mercy. Prayer leans on His breast. "Pray without ceasing." Brethren, let us keep the glorious end of our faith in view, even the salvation of our souls. We need to feel the coming of the end in every service, and in every religious exercise, as the sailor sees the beacons of his native land coming in sight when nearing the shore. Bend to the oar, and pull for the shore. Watching and praying will soon be over. Look to the end of these, for there you will see the crown and the Saviour.—*Anon.*

Ver. 8. *The Pre-eminence of Charity.*—The grace of charity is exalted as the highest attainment of the Christian life by St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. John. These three men were very different from each other. Each was the type of a distinct order of character. And it is a proof that the gospel is from God, and that the sacred writings are inspired from a single Divine source, that personal peculiarities are not placed foremost in them, but the foremost place is given by each to a grace which certainly was not the characteristic quality of all the three. Love is over all and above all, above intellect, freedom, courage.

I. **What charity is.**—Charity has become identified with almsgiving. Love is appropriated to one particular form of human affection, and that one

with which self and passion mix inevitably. Philanthropy is a word too cold and negative. Charity may be defined as the desire to give, and the desire to bless. 1. *The desire to give.* Not to get something, but to give something. The mightier, the more irrepressible this yearning to give is, the more truly is the love love. Sacrifice, in some shape or other, is the impulse of love, and its restlessness is only satisfied and only gets relief in giving. For this, in truth, is God's own love, the will and the power to give. 2. *The desire to bless.* Even weak and spurious love desires happiness of some kind for the creature that it loves. What we call philanthropy is often calm and cool—too calm and cool to waste upon it the name of charity. But it is a calm and cool desire that human happiness were possible. It is, in its weak way, a desire to bless. Now, the love whereof the Bible speaks, and of which we have but one perfect personification—viz., in the life of Christ—is the desire for the best and true blessedness of the being loved. It wishes the well-being of the whole man—body, soul, and spirit; but chiefly spirit. The highest love is the desire to make men good and Godlike. Concerning this charity, notice (1) It is characterised as fervent. Literally, intense, unremitting, unwearied. Fervent charity—Christ's spirit—does not tire, and cannot be worn out; it loves its enemies, and does good to them that hate it. (2) It is capable of being cultivated. We assume that, simply because it is enjoined. How shall we cultivate it? (*a*) Love cannot be produced by a direct action of the soul upon itself. You cannot love by a resolve to love. Effort of heart is followed by collapse. Excitement is followed by exhaustion. It is as impossible for a man to work himself into a state of genuine, fervent love as it is for a man to inspire himself. (*b*) We may, however, cultivate charity by doing acts which love demands. It is God's merciful law that feelings are increased by acts done on principle. If a man has not the feeling in its warmth, let him not wait till the feeling comes. Let him act with such feeling as he has; with a cold heart if he has not got a warm one: it will grow warmer while he acts. (*c*) We cultivate Christian love by contemplating the love of God. Love begets love. Love, believed in, produces a return of love; we cannot love because we *must*. "Must" kills love; but the law of our nature is that we love in reply to love.

II. **What charity does.**—It covereth a multitude of sins. But whose sins? Is it that the sins of the charitable man are covered by his charity in God's sight? Or is it the sins of others over which charity throws a mantle, so as not to see them? The latter must be meant. There are three ways, at least, in which love covers sin. 1. In refusing to see small faults. 2. By making large allowances. It understands by sympathy. It is that glorious nature which has affinity with good under all forms, and loves to find it, to believe in it, and to see it. Those with such natures—God's rare and best ones—learn to make allowances, not from weak sentiment, which calls wrong right, but from that heavenly charity which sees right lying at the root of wrong. 3. By tolerating even intolerance. Let no man think that he can be tolerant or charitable as a matter of self-indulgence. For real charity and real toleration he must pay the price.—*F. W. Robertson.*

Ver. 11. *In All Things Glorifying God.*

Apply this rule—

I. **To the labours of the understanding.**—We may read all things, and yet read as God's scholars; drawing even from the writings of those who thought but of evil, or at least were utterly careless of God, a food for holy and spiritual principles to be nourished with.

II. **To our labours of charity, or our acts of kindness to our neighbours.**—If we give but a cup of cold water to one of the humblest of our brethren, let it

be done for Christ's sake. Too often our charity is very unsanctified; we think of our suffering brethren only, without remembering who it is that puts Himself forward in their persons to receive our love, and, if we will but see Him, to take, in their behalf, the office of over-paying all that we can do to them. Apply this rule—

III. **To all our more general conduct, the things which do not come under the two previous divisions.**—There is no real goodness, there is even no safety from condemnation, unless we glorify God through Jesus Christ. With regard to the employment of our time, the exercise of our bodily faculties, the government of our tongues, how soon shall we be satisfied, and into how much of real sin shall we continually be falling, if we do not, in all these matters, remember that we are but stewards of God's manifold bounties; that our time, our bodies, and the wonderful faculty of speech, were all only lent us to improve them—lent us to glorify Him who gave them.—*T. Arnold, D.D.*

God Seeks His Own Glory.—The glory of God, or the showing forth of His nature and attributes, is necessarily His own chief end in all His works of creation and providence. It is so especially in the wondrous constitution of the Church, and must therefore be her chief end also in all the service that she renders to His name. And as God's love to her flows ever in the channel of Christ's mediation, and Christ's presence with her by His word and spirit is the sole cause of her life and activity, so, likewise, it is "through Jesus Christ" that her answering tribute of praise reaches the eternal throne.—*Lillie.*

Ver. 12. *The Vindication of Suffering.*—Suffering fills a large place in our present system. It is not an accident, it enters into every life. A great amount of suffering may be traced to human ignorance and guilt, and this will gradually disappear in proportion to the progress of truth and virtue. Still, under the imperfections which seem inseparable from this first stage of our being, a great amount of suffering will remain. God intends that we shall suffer. It is sometimes said that He has created nothing for the purpose of giving pain, but that every contrivance in the system has good for its object. All this is true, and a beautiful illustration of kind purpose in the Creator. But it is also true that every organ of the body, in consequence of the delicacy of its structure, and its susceptibility to influences from abroad, becomes an inlet of acute pain. And how much pain comes from the spirit, and from the very powers and affections which make the glory of our nature! Suffering comes to us through and from our whole nature. It cannot be winked out of sight. It cannot be thrust into a subordinate place in the picture of human life. It is the chief burden of history. It is the solemn theme of one of the highest departments of literature, the tragic drama. It gives to fictions their deep interest. It wails through much of our poetry. A large part of human vocations are intended to shut up some of its avenues. It has left traces on every human countenance over which years have passed. It is, to not a few, the most vivid recollection of life. We are created with a susceptibility of pain, and severe pain. This is a part of our nature, as truly as our susceptibility of enjoyment. God has implanted it, and has thus opened in the very centre of our being a fountain of suffering. One of the most common indications of Divine benevolence is found in the fact that, much as men suffer, they enjoy more. We are told that there is a great balance of pleasure over pain, and that it is by what *prevails* in a system that we must judge of its author There is a grand vindication of God's benevolence, not reaching, indeed, to every case of suffering, not broad enough to cover the whole ground of human experience, but still so comprehensive, so sublime, that what remains obscure would be turned

into light, could all its connections be discerned. This is found in the truth that benevolence has a higher aim than to bestow enjoyment; and this requires suffering in order to be gained. As long as we narrow our view of benevolence, and see in it only a disposition to bestow pleasure, so long life will be a mystery; for pleasure is plainly not its great end. Amidst the selfish and animal principles of our nature, there is an awful power, a sense of right, a voice which speaks of duty, an idea grander than the largest personal interest—the idea of excellence, of perfection. Here is the seal of Divinity on us; here the sign of our descent from God. It is in *this gift* that we see the benevolence of God. It is in writing this inward law on the heart, it is in giving us the conception of moral goodness, and the power to strive after it, the power of self-conflict and self-denial, of surrendering pleasure to duty, and of suffering for the right, the true, and the good—it is in thus enduing us, and not in giving us capacities of pleasure, that God's goodness shines; and of consequence, whatever gives a field, and excitement, and exercise, and strength, and dignity to these principles of our nature, is the highest manifestation of benevolence. The end of our being is to educate, bring out, and perfect, the Divine principles of our nature. We were made, and are upheld in life for this as our great end, that we may be true to the principle of duty within us, that we may put down all desire and appetite beneath the inward law; that we may enthrone God, the infinitely perfect Father, in our souls; that we may count all things as dross, in comparison with sanctity of heart and life; that we may hunger and thirst for righteousness more than for daily food; that we may resolutely and honestly seek for and communicate truth; that disinterested love and impartial justice may triumph over every motion of selfishness, and every tendency to wrong-doing; in a word, that our whole lives, labours, conversation may express and strengthen reverence for ourselves, for our fellow-creatures, and above all for God. Such is the good for which we were made; and in order to this triumph of virtuous and religious principles, we are exposed to temptation, hardship, pain. Is suffering, then, inconsistent with God's love? I might show how suffering ministers to human excellence; how it calls forth the magnanimous and sublime virtues, and at the same time nourishes the tenderest, sweetest sympathies of our nature; how it raises us to energy, and to the consciousness of our powers, and at the same time infuses the meekest dependence on God; how it stimulates toil for the goods of this world, and at the same time weans us from it, and lifts us above it. I do not, then, doubt God's beneficence on account of the sorrows and pains of life.—*W. E. Channing, D.D.*

The Mystery of Pain.—We must accept pain as a fact existing by a deep necessity, having its root in the essential order of the world. If we are to understand it, we must learn to look on it with different eyes. And does not a different thought suggest itself even while we recognise that the others fail? For if the reason and the end of pain lie beyond the results that have been mentioned, then they lie beyond the individual. Pain, if it exist for any purpose, and have any end or use—and of this what sufferer can endure to doubt?—must have some purpose which extends beyond the interests of the person who is called upon to bear it. For the ends which have been mentioned include all that concerns the individual himself. That which surpasses these rises into a larger than the individual sphere. From this ground it becomes evident again that to know the secret of our pains we must look beyond ourselves. —*Howard Hinton.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 12—19.

Christian Suffering No Surprise.—The burning fire is the symbol of afflictions and persecutions. The mind of the apostle goes back once more to those afflictions which the Christians of the Dispersion were, at that time, called to endure (chap. i. 6, 7, ii. 19-21, iii. 15-17). All who profess the faith in Christ must take into full account the fact that only "through much tribulation" can any man enter the kingdom.

> "The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
> Leads to the place where sorrow is unknown."

Christian suffering should be no surprise because—

I. **It is needed for proving us.**—"The fiery trial cometh upon you to prove you." That is not precisely the same thing as to *discipline* you. The cases of Abraham, Job, and the Lord Jesus, show that proving the good, by suffering experiences, is the condition of advance in spiritual life and power. The poet "learns in suffering what he teaches in song." And the Christian's power to serve is a product of his trying experiences.

II. **It does but bring us into the line of Christ.**—We have solved the mystery of *our* sufferings when we have solved the mystery of *His*. "Though He were a son, yet learned He obedience by the things that He suffered." He was "made perfect through suffering to be a bringer-on of sons to glory." Moral power cannot be gained, save in Christ's way.

III. **It is the medium for conveying special grace to us** (ver. 14).—"The Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God resteth upon you." These afflictions are the *special* agencies of the Spirit, and signs of unusual interest in you, concern for you, and purposes for you.

IV. **It is best seen as part of the Divine judgment on the race.**—Which you are bearing vicariously, in order that you may be ministers of the Divine mercy that always blends with judgment.

V. **It may be difficult to endure these afflictions well.**—"The righteous is scarcely saved." You must put your whole heart and effort into the enduring, since the perils are so extreme. Life well-nigh masters everybody, with its strain and stress. Only the grace of God, sanctifying the most constant and careful watchfulness, gets even the righteous man through. Christian living is no easy thing.

VI. **Suffering in well-doing can only be borne to right issues when there is full trust in God, and the absolute committal of ourselves to Him in well-doing.**—"In the acceptance of sufferings as being according to the will of God, much more is meant than the mere submission to an inevitable destiny. If we really think of pain and persecution as working out God's will, permitted and controlled by Him, we know that that will is righteous and loving, planning nothing less than our completeness in holiness (1 Thess. iv. 3), the will of which we daily pray that it may be done on earth as it is in heaven" (*Dean Plumptre*).

A. J. Mason, in "Ellicott's Commentary," paraphrases ver. 19 thus: "Consider the mildness of these trials compared with the terrors overhanging the sinful. Even if the worst should come to the worst, and you must die a martyr's death, it is but the execution of God's plan for you. View your life as a deposit lay it confidently in His hands, to be returned to you again when the time comes, and you will find Him faithful to what a Creator ought to be." The "will of God," in accordance with which they "suffer," is part of the act of creation. The term "faithful Creator" contains the idea that the act of creation mposes duties and responsibilities on the Creator. In the Greek the words

"in well-doing" are made emphatic by being placed last in the sentence. Punishment is the word for suffering which attends on wrong-doing. Discipline is the word for suffering which comes to frail-doing. Sanctifying is the proper word for suffering which is associated with well-doing.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Vers 15. *Busybodies.*—It is but one word in the original (meaning), as bishops in another's diocese, as pryers into other men's matters, as pragmatical persons that meddle with other men's concernments, without cause or call. It is not suffering for evil-doing, but suffering for well-doing, that carries the crown (2 Tim. ii. 12). It is not just, but unjust suffering, that hath the recompense of reward annexed to it (1 Pet. iii. 14, iv. 14). It is not sufferers *for* the evil of sin, nor sufferers *of* the evil of sin; but sufferers of the evil of punishment, for the avoiding of the evil of sin, whose cause is good.—*Brooks.*

Bishops of Those Without.—"Others, through excess of zeal, declaimed aloud against the Pagans, and cast their vices in their teeth. Their more sensible brethren humorously called them "bishops," or "overseers of those who are without" (*Renan*). Such is, indeed, the meaning of the droll word which St. Peter here gives: except that, instead of "bishops of those without," it means "bishops of other men's matters." It denotes those prying and self-important people, who fancy they can set everything to rights, and that everybody they come across is under their personal jurisdiction. Such persons would tend to make Christianity unpopular among the unbelievers, and in case of persecution would be the first to "suffer" (*i.e.*, to be picked out for martyrdom); and while flattering themselves for the boldness with which they had spoken out, they would incur St. Peter's censure, and their martyrdom would be reckoned no martyrdom by the Church. "Cruel mishaps," continues M. Renan, "befell them; and the wise directors of the community, so far from extolling them, told them pretty plainly that it did but serve them right."—*A. J. Mason, M.A.*

Vers. 17-19. *The Time of Visitation.*—A new reason is here introduced why Christians should suffer gladly for their Lord's sake. He will deliver them from the terrible judgments which are about to burst on the ungodly, and their souls will find rest in God, to whom they commit themselves as to a faithful Creator.

I. The visitation of judgment.—1. *Its beginning.* When St. Peter wrote, the city and temple of Jerusalem were still standing, but were threatened. The coming visitation affected believers as discipline, before it affected the ungodly as judgment. 2. *Its progress.* "What shall the end be of them that *obey* not the gospel of God." If the sons are chastised, what have the rebels to expect? Not with impunity shall any one, on any grounds whatever, disobey the gospel of God. 3. *Its results.* The righteous are saved with difficulty. In consequence of the severity of the trial, and their own weakness, they barely escape the judgments of the Most High (illustrated by the haste of the escape of the Christians to Pella). The ungodly are those who care not for God; sinners are those who make a trade of sin. What will be their doom?

II. The lesson to believers.—Drawn from these facts: 1. An exhortation to those who suffer according to the will of God. They never suffer but when God wills, and He will not always chide, nor lay upon them more than they are able to bear. 2. What are such sufferers to do? Commit the keeping of their souls to God, and put all their strength into well-doing. 3. The encouragement to do this arises

from the fact that He is "a faithful Creator."—*Thornley Smith.*

Suffering a Common Experience.—All Christians are not tried as the Christians to whom Peter wrote—the Christians at the close of the Jewish dispensation; but all Christians meet with afflictions, and meet with afflictions because they are Christians; all suffer, and all suffer as Christians. We must never think ill of a cause merely because it is persecuted, nor indulge dark thoughts respecting the spiritual state and prospects of men merely because they are very severely afflicted. The absence of trial is a worse sign than what we may be disposed to think the excess of trial. It is not exposure to trial, but the endurance of trial, in "a patient continuance in well-doing," that is a characteristic mark of those who obey the gospel of God.—*Dr. J. Brown.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 2. *Lawful Pleasure.*—Undoubtedly there is a degree of natural pleasure, connected with the exercise of the appetites, which is lawful. But it is very obvious that *self* is the natural man, which, in always seeking for pleasure, without regarding either its nature or its lawfulness, has polluted everything here. It is in connection with the appetites in their unsanctified state that we find one of the strong ties which bind man to his idols, and which subject his proud spirit. This strong bond must be sundered. No one can be acceptable to God who does not crucify and reject every form of attraction and pleasure from this source which is not in accordance with the intentions of nature, and does not receive the Divine approbation and sanction.—*Upham.*

Ver. 8. "*Fervent.*"—Literally intense, unremitting, unwearied. Now, there is a feeble sentiment which wishes well to all so long as it is not tempted to wish them ill, which does well to those who do well to them. But this, being mere sentiment, will not last. Ruffle it, and it becomes vindictive. In contrast with that, St. Peter calls Christ's spirit which loves those who hate it, "fervent charity," which does not tire, and cannot be worn out; which loves its enemies, and does good to them that hate it. For Christian love is not the dream of a philosopher sitting in his study, and benevolently wishing the world were better than it is; congratulating himself, perhaps, all the time on the superiority shown by himself over other less amiable natures. Injure one of these beaming sons of good-nature, and he bears malice—deep, unrelenting, refusing to forgive. But give us the man who, instead of retiring to some small, select society, or rather association, where his own opinions shall be reflected, can mix with men where his sympathies are unmet, and his tastes are jarred, and his views traversed at every turn, and still can be just, and gentle, and forbearing.—*F. W. Robertson.*

Ver. 9. *Eastern Hospitality.*—I was beginning to make my meal upon the food we had with us, when in came nine people, each bearing a dish. A large tray was raised on the rim of a corn-sieve placed on the ground, in the centre of which was placed a tureen of soup, with pieces of bread around it. The stranger, my servant, and a person who seemed to be the head man of the village, sat round the tray, dipping their wooden spoons or fingers into each dish as it was placed in succession before them. Of the nine dishes, I observed three were soups. I asked why this was, and who was to pay for the repast, and was informed it was the custom of the people, strictly enjoined by their religion, that, as soon as a stranger appears, each peasant should bring his dish, he himself remaining to partake of it after the stranger—a sort of picnic, of which the stranger partakes without contributing. The hospitality extends to everything he requires; his horse is fed, and wood is brought for his fire, each inhabitant feeling honoured by offering something. This custom accounts for the frequent recurrence of the same dish, as no one knows what his neighbour will contribute. Towards a Turkish guest this practice is perfectly disinterested, but from an European they may have possibly been led to expect some kind of return, although to offer payment would be an insult. The whole of the contributors afterwards sat down and ate in another part of the room.—*Fellows.*

Grudging.—The word that is here translated "grudging" signifies murmuring, or unwillingness in doing anything, as if it were torn and forced from one, rather than proceeded from a free inclination. And this hateful, churlish way of almsgiving St. Paul likewise expressly forbids, and says our charity must not be shown grudgingly, or of necessity (2 Cor. ix. 7; Rom. xii. 8). And here we cannot but admire and adore the infinite goodness of God, who has not only

obliged us to the substance of this duty, but has so ordered the very circumstantials of it that the necessitous may be relieved with as much decency and ease to themselves as can be, and the alms of others look rather like their own propriety, as the payment of a debt, or restoring of a pledge, or bestowing of a reward; and that their souls might not be grieved by frowns, and taunts, and unkind language, when they receive supply for the needs of their body.

Ver. 16. *The Name "Christian."*—"There are only three places in the New Testament where the name *Christian* occurs. It is plain that for a long time there was no commonly recognised term of this kind. Hence they are called variously, "they that believed" (Acts ii. 44), "the disciples" (vi. 1), "those of the way" (ix. 2), etc. Again, the name of Nazarenes was applied to them by the Jews, as a term of reproach, but plainly arose before the extension of the faith to the Gentiles. It was at Antioch that the large accession of Gentiles first made it impossible to look upon them merely as a Jewish sect, and required the use of some more distinctive title. It was natural, therefore, that the use of such a title should first prevail at Antioch. When the book [Acts of the Apostles] was written, towards the close of Paul's imprisonment at Rome, the formation of churches in the chief cities of almost every province would awaken inquiry as to the origin of this new name, that was already in every one's mouth. How suitable, then, would be this passing remark of the historian (Acts xi. 26), to show when and where it began to be current! —*Birks.*

Called Christians.—The word χρηματίσαι, used by St. Luke ("they were called"), implies the thing to have been done by some public and solemn act and declaration of the whole Church; such being the use of the word in the imperial edicts and proclamations of those times, the emperors being said χρηματίζειν, "to style themselves," when they publicly proclaimed by what titles they would be called. . . . Such being the general acceptation of the word, St. Luke (who was himself a native of this city) makes use of it to express that solemn declaration whereby the disciples of the religion entitled themselves to the name of Christians.—*Cave.*

Ver. 17. *The Danger of Unbelief.*—In one of the popular books of the present day there is a story told of "The Sunken Rock." A vessel, named the *Thetis*, was cruising in the Mediterranean, in search of a shoal or bank, or something of that kind, said to exist beneath the treacherous waters. The captain, after he had adopted all the means he thought necessary, having failed, abandoned the enterprise, declaring "that the reported danger was all a dream." An officer on board formed a different judgment, went out by himself on an expedition afterwards into the very same latitude and longitude, and there discovered a reef of rocks, which he reported to the Admiralty, and it was inserted in the charts, the discoverer being rewarded with a high appointment. The intelligence came to the captain's ears; he would not believe in the discovery. He was a shrewd, clever, practical man, but unscientific, incredulous, and obstinate. "The whole thing is a falsehood," he exclaimed; adding, "If ever I have the keel of the *Thetis* under me in those waters again, if I don't carry her clean over where the chart marks a rock, call me a liar and no seaman." Two years after, he was conveying in the same vessel the British Ambassador to Naples. One windy night he and the master were examining the chart on deck by the light of the lantern, when the latter pointed out the sunken rock on the map. "What!" exclaimed the old seaman, "is this invention to meet me in the teeth again? No; I swore I would sail over that spot the first chance I had, and I'll do it." He went down into the cabin, merrily related the story to the company, and said, "Within five minutes we shall have passed the spot." There was a pause. Then, taking out his watch, he said, "Oh, the time is past. We have gone over the wonderful reef." But presently a grating touch was felt on the ship's keel, then a sudden shock, a tremendous crash—the ship had foundered. Through great exertions most of the crew were saved, but the captain would not survive his own mad temerity, and the last seen of him was his white figure, bareheaded, and in his shirt, from the dark hull of the *Thetis*, as the foam burst round her bows and stem. He perished, a victim of unbelief. So perish multitudes.

Ver. 18. *Scarcely Saved.*—There is such a fate as being saved, yet so as by fire, going into the brightness with the smell of fire on your garments.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

CHAPTER V.

THE ATTITUDE OF HUMILITY.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

THE exhortations are still designed to meet the crisis in which the Churches were placed. In keeping together, preserving the Christian spirit, and serving one another in their various relations, they would be kept safely, brought through, and even sanctified by their experiences.

Ver. 1. **Elders.**—Names of office carried over from the Jewish synagogues. **Exhort.**—*παρακαλῶ*, a very full word, including encouragement and entreaty, and even consolation and exhortation. **An elder.**—Fellow-elder. St. Peter puts this prominently. The sympathy of the fellow-elder, rather than the authority of the apostle. **Partaker.**—The word is chosen in the same spirit, and suggests "joint partaker with you."

Ver. 2. **Feed.**—"Tend," implying the various duties of the shepherd. **Willingly.**—"According to God;" in cheerful recognition of His call and His will.

Ver. 3. **As being lords.**—"Nor yet as lording it." "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." **God's heritage.**—There is no word in the original answering to *God's*. R.V. reads, "the charge allotted to you."

Ver. 4. **Chief shepherd.**—"This beautiful term seems to have been invented by St. Peter. (See Heb. xiii. 20). **A crown.**—Better, "*the* crown." **Of glory.**—Or "crown amarantine, of the flower that fadeth not."

Ver. 5. **Be clothed.**—Lit. "gird yourselves." Perhaps the word refers to the frock, or apron, distinctive of slaves. Strictly, the Greek word means, "tie yourselves up in humility." *ἐγκομβώσασθε*, from *κόμβος*, a top-knot, as a cock's *comb*, or bow-knot, or ornamental fastening by which vestments are drawn about the wearer. Make humility your outermost, conspicuous dress, that which covers all the rest, or binds all into one. (There was a peculiar kind of cape, well known by a name taken from this verb—we might call it a "tie-up"—and this kind of cape was worn by slaves, and by no others. It was, in fact, a badge of servitude.)

Ver. 6. **Humble yourselves.**—Especially with a view to the quiet bearing of the afflictions and distresses you may be called to endure.

Ver. 8. **The devil.**—Thought of under the figure of a wild beast that, at any moment, may put the flock in peril. Those who fall into sin are often surprised at the sudden and overwhelming character of their temptation. **Adversary.**—See Matt. v. 25. *διάβολος* term in LXX. for the Hebrew "Satan," with special idea of "making charges against." **Devour.**—"Gulp down."

Ver. 9. **The faith.**—Better, "*your* faith." **Are accomplished.**—Are being accomplished.

Ver. 12. **Silvanus.**—See Notes on Verses.

Ver. 13. **Babylon.**—Precisely, the sentence reads: "the co-elect one" [fem. sing.] "in Babylon." This makes it the greeting of an individual, not of a Church. It might be the message of St. Peter's wife. Whether the term "Babylon" is descriptive or symbolic is disputable. A new city had arisen near the old one, and a considerable population dwelt in it. There is no good reason for resisting the conclusion that the letter was sent from this town. There was a military fortress in Egypt named Babylon, but it is not probable that St. Peter was there.

Ver. 14. **Kiss of charity.**—Or *love* (Rom. xvi. 16; 1 Cor. xvi. 20; 2 Cor. xiii. 12). "This was an accompaniment of that social worship which marked Christianity, and arose from the tendency of the Christian religion to encourage honour towards all men, as men, and to cherish the softer affections of the heart." The early custom almost only survives in the use of the *Osculatorium*, or kissing token, known as the *Pax* (sometimes a relic, sometimes an ivory or metal tablet, with sacred symbols cut on it), which was passed through the congregation, and kissed by each in turn.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—4.

Official Models.—This direct message to the "elders" of the Church may be taken as indicating that the Churches of Christ were organised, and the term "elders" suggests that the first forms of organisation were modelled after the pattern of the Jewish synagogue. It is significant that St. Peter does not address these elders with any authority as an apostle, with any assumption of

superiority as a higher official, but puts himself on their level, and makes his experience, not his authority, the ground of his persuasion. The advice of a fellow-elder, one with a longer and fuller experience, would be altogether more acceptable and effective than any commands based on claim of Divine authority. St. Paul is in full sympathy with St. Peter in this attitude towards the elders of the Churches when he says, "Not that we have lordship over your faith, but are helpers of your joy" (2 Cor. i. 24). St. Peter's right to advise ("exhort," a term which in the Greek includes encouragement, and entreaty, and even consolation, as well as exhortation) rests upon (1) his official position; he also was an elder; (2) upon his personal experience and knowledge of the fact that the Lord Jesus had to endure the severest sufferings because of His persistency in well-doing—St. Peter was a direct personal "witness of the sufferings of Christ;" and (3) upon his actual fellowship with these elders in the hopes which cheered them under the present burdens of anxiety and suffering. St. Peter was "a partaker"—with them—"of the glory that is to be revealed. The advice concerns—

I. **Good shepherding.**—The Lord Jesus had given the shepherd figure to His Church, and had sanctioned it, by using it for His own relations, as in John x. The figure had, however, been previously used by the prophets, and is a natural and suggestive one for a people who were largely concerned in the tending of flocks, and whose first fathers were heads of wandering tribes. (See, for illustration of prophetic use, Jer. xxiii. 1-4; Ezek. xxxiv. 2-31). It will at once be seen that shepherding suggests much more than preaching, or even teaching. It suggests ruling, providing, and even tending and correcting. The older idea of shepherding we put into the term *pastoral*: the modern pastor is the shepherd-elder of the Early Church. St. Peter fixes one point: good shepherding has in it no taint of *self-seeking*. And self-seeking usually takes two forms in persons who are placed in official positions. It shows itself in using the office to enrich the self, or to attain the pleasure which comes from being able to lord it over others. But under this head the thought had better be confined to the one mark of good shepherding—wise, skilful, efficient *feeding* and tending of the flock of God; which may be amply illustrated by references to the various calls on an Eastern shepherd's care, in the ever-varying daily needs of his flock.

II. **Wise authority.**—"Exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to God." Sometimes a person is put into office who feels unfit for it. Sometimes a person is put into office because there is no one else who is fit for it. In either case there may be lacking that *willingness* which would make it a service of love. And the true Christly service never can be rendered, save as a willing service of love. Wise authority in a Church is that which he alone can wield who loves the members, seeks their highest well-being, and is ever ready to put his own advantage, and even his own preferences, aside in order to secure it. Unwilling authority is sure to be unwise and unworthy.

III. **Pure motive.**—"Nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you." Impure motive is seen in using an official position for securing any personal ends. The position in Christ's Church is essentially one of service to others. It may, indeed, bring both gain and authority to the official, but these, as belonging to the self-sphere, he must in no way seek.

IV. **Attractive example.**—"But making yourselves ensamples to the flock." The official position gives personal example a special importance. The elders of a Church ought to be specimen Christians; models, not only in the administering of their office, but also in their personal character. And the chief shepherd may be relied on to recognise, approve, and reward, all under-shepherds who prove faithful, and present good models.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 2. *The Pastor's Duty.*—The pastoral duty is three-fold:—1. To feed the flock, by preaching to them the sincere Word of God, and ruling them according to such directions and discipline as the Word of God prescribes, both which are implied in this expression, *Feed the flock.* 2. The pastors of the Church must "take the oversight thereof." The elders are exhorted to do the office of bishops (as the word signifies), by personal care and vigilance over all the flock committed to their charge. 3. They must be "examples to the flock," and practise the holiness, self-denial, mortification, and all other Christian duties, which they preach and recommend to their people. These duties must be performed "not by constraint," not because you must do them, not from compulsion of the civil power, or the constraint of fear or shame, but from a willing mind that takes pleasure in the work: "not for filthy lucre," or any emoluments and profits attending the place where you reside, or any perquisites belonging to the office, "but of a ready mind," regarding the flock more than the fleece, sincerely and cheerfully endeavouring to serve the Church of God. "Neither as being lords over God's heritage," tyrannising over them by compulsion and coercive force, or imposing unscriptural and human inventions upon them instead of necessary duty (Matt. xx. 25, 26; 2 Cor. i. 24). Learn 1. The eminent dignity of the Church of God, and all the true members of it. 2. The pastors of the Church ought to consider their people as the flock of God, as God's heritage, and treat them accordingly. 3. Those ministers who are either driven to their work by necessity, or drawn to it by filthy lucre, can never perform their duty as they ought, because they do not do it willingly, and with a ready mind. 4. The best way a minister can take to engage the respect of a people is to discharge his own duty among them in the best manner he can, and to be a constant example to them of all that is good.—*Matthew Henry.*

Lucre and Filthy Lucre.—The word "lucre" appears five times in the Bible; and in every case it bears a bad signification. It is remarkable that the warning against the love of lucre—of filthy lucre—is in all these cases intended for ministers of religion. They are addressed, not to merchants, but to bishops, deacons, elders as such, whatever secular occupations they might be engaged in. How comes it to pass that ministers of religion should be marked out for this word of caution? Perhaps even in the time of the apostles there were symptoms of this evil in the ministry of the Church, and certainly in after times the evil became so great, so monstrous, that there was urgent need for condemnation stronger far than that expressed in the words of St. Peter and St. Paul. The word "lucre" is not in itself a word of evil signification. It simply means "gain." No one objects to it when it appears in another form, and a business is spoken of as lucrative. Practically the distinction between "lucre" and "filthy lucre" has been lost; a curious instance of the manner in which the world unintentionally accuses and condemns itself. The world evidently feels in its conscience that generally there is something bad in connection with gain. I venture to draw a very marked distinction between "lucre" and "filthy lucre." Lucre is gain, and gain of all sorts, mental as well as material; and the love of lucre may be a virtue and not a vice. No man is more greedy of lucre than a very studious man. But let us take the word in its commonest signification, as money, material gain—gain in the form of money, or money's worth. The loss of the distinction between lucre and filthy lucre has, in some instances, proved disadvantageous to the world's interest. Lucre and

filthy lucre being confounded very much in the religious mind of the Middle Ages, there rose up an immense mass of mendicancy. There is lucre that is not filthy, but perfectly clean. The lucre that is made by honest labour and honest trading is nowhere condemned in the Word of God. The Word of God, indeed, rather approves of it, and encourages men in the pursuit of it. A man's moral and religious character does not necessarily suffer through the acquisition of lucre. Job, we are told, was the greatest man of the East—he certainly was one of the best men, East or West. A conscientious but timid man of old, named Agur, prayed that God would give him neither poverty nor riches; he was afraid of the demoralising influence of either extreme. But a far wiser and better man than Agur—the apostle Paul—felt that his religion was such as enabled him to set riches and poverty equally at defiance in regard to any demoralising tendency. Religion is in a considerable measure sustained by lucre. The riches of lucre enable a man to be rich in good works; and so the quest of lucre becomes a religious duty, because its result leads to a man's greater power of usefulness. But "filthy lucre" is quite another thing. It is gain gotten in dishonest and dishonourable ways; by violence, by fraud, by falsehood, by misrepresentation, by taking unfair and cruel advantage of the ignorance or the necessity of our neighbour. And it is to the great discredit of many professedly religious people that they are in these matters no more to be trusted than the most worldly of worldlings. Moreover, the lucre that is filthy, through being gained in evil ways, cannot be clean through spending it liberally and piously. God will graciously accept lucre, but will refuse with indignation filthy lucre. Lucre is filthy when gained wrongly, and becomes filthy, however honestly made, when wrongly used; when self and selfish indulgence is a man's great aim and object; when it is applied to purposes of corruption, oppression, injustice, profligacy; when it is withheld from those good works which it ought to encourage and to help; when a man makes it his idol, and worships it as his god; in such cases it is defiled and defiling. Of our lucre, be it little or much, we shall have to give account to God.—*H. Stowell Brown.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 5—7.

Humility in Church Relations.—It is but natural that the apostle, in giving his advice to the Church, in view of its circumstances of disability, temptation, and peril, should first address the "elders" or officials, and then address the members of the Church, dividing them into the "younger ones" and the "rest."

I. **Humility in the younger takes form as submission.**—"Likewise, ye younger, be subject unto the elder." The very energy of activity and enterprise, that should be characteristic of young people, may make them unduly confident, and over-masterful. Young people will seldom take any advice from the older ones. But the Christian spirit should have its influence on this characteristic weakness, and make the young members humbly submit themselves to superior wisdom and experience. Humility in Church life, possessing both the younger and the elder, would enable the energetic younger to inspire the slow and sluggish elder; and the careful and experienced elder to tone and temper the impulsive younger.

II. **Humility in the elder takes form as service.**—"Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another." When St. Paul would plead for Christian humility, he presents the example of Christ, saying, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"; and when we follow his illustration we see that it was a mind of humility which showed itself in service—sacrificing

service. If, without asserting himself, or getting for himself, each member is supremely anxious to find opportunities for serving the others, there need be no fear whatever of the Church relations being pleasantly sustained. And St. Peter, perhaps, had especially in mind the way in which such humble and self-forgetting mutual service would help the Churches in the time of difficulty and strain, which might involve serious loss and persecution for particular members. The times provided plentiful occasions for fulfilling the injunction, "By love serve one another."

III. **Humility in all the members of the Church towards God.**—This is the humility—basal humility—on which must rest all humility in the various relations of the Church. A man will never be humble-minded in his relations with his fellow-man unless he is, and keeps, humble-minded towards God. And this is the *right* attitude to take before God. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." But is this to be taken as vague and general, or as precise and particular? If the latter, then St. Peter means, by the "mighty hand of God," just those circumstances of distress and peril in which the Christians were then placed, which, from one point of view, were the schemes of enemies, but from a higher point of view were the permissions, and overrulings, and discipline, of God—the "mighty hand of God"—to which they should respond in the humbling of a cheerfully gracious submission and endurance. Taken in this light, we see at once how the sentence, "casting all your care (anxiety) upon Him," is a very tender and pathetic re-statement of the earlier sentence: "humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God." It is the best sign of a true humility before God that we do not try to keep our own care, as if we felt that we could, but are fully willing, in a child-spirit, to *let* our Father care, being quite sure that He *does* care. The humility of the child before God will be sure to nourish the humility of the brother, which will find fitting expression in all the relations with the brothers. "It would be a sad calamity for Christians under persecution, suddenly to find God Himself in array on the enemy's side; and this they would find if they went against discipline." "The humility here recommended is not merely a submissive bearing of the strokes which it pleased God to let fall upon them, but it was to be shown in their bearing towards one another."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Vers. 5-7. *Service Free from Care.*—Single sentences taken out of Bible passages may oftentimes suggest very beautiful and very helpful meditations and sentiments; but he would be a very limp and weak Christian, having no strengthening principles, and no strong grip of steadying truths, who should persist in living entirely on single texts. The familiar words, "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you," have made solacing music for our souls in many of the anxious times of life. We love them, as we love the friends who have put their hands gently into ours when we entered, and went through, the dark valleys of our life's sorrows. And yet the *passage* into which those words are fitted lights up the familiar sentence with new meaning, and gives it a fresh, and more practical bearing on that Christian life which we are pledged to live. We may be quite sure that St. Peter dwelt much in thought upon the brief time of his fellowship with the "Man, Christ Jesus," in whom he discerned the "Son of God." And two scenes especially must have come up before him with great frequency. He would often see the high priest's palace; recall again his shameful denials of his Lord; and feel afresh the "look" that melted him into penitence. But he must have tried to shut out that scene: to dwell on it too much was to

bring undue depressions upon his spirit. He would turn to another scene; he would free his thoughts from weak and sinful self, and try to fix them upon Jesus. St. Peter would love to go over again and again the scene in the upper chamber before the Lord's last Passover—though it also had its smaller humiliations for him. He would see again the surpassing dignity of his Divine Lord, as He rose from supper, laid aside His garments, took a towel, and girded Himself, as if He were but the servant of the house; poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded. Could St. Peter ever forget the *look* that was on the face of his Lord when He had taken His garments, and was seated again. Could He ever lose out of his soul the *words* that were then spoken by Him "who spake as never man spake"? They thrill us now as we read them. How they must have thrilled him who heard them fresh from the sacred Lips! "Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I, then, he Lord and the Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you." The scene was evidently in St. Peter's mind, and the words were evidently in his memory, when he wrote the passage which is before us as a text. He has been, in the previous verses, giving particular counsels, precisely adapted to the "elder" and to the "younger" members of the Church. And then he thinks of something that needs to be pressed upon the attention of every one. It is the example of their Divine Lord, and his, on that solemn supper night. "Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another; for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time; casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He careth for you." Remembering that St. Peter wrote his letter to Jewish Christians, scattered abroad, who were called to endure much and varied persecution on account of their faith in Christ, the point of His counsel at once appears. Such persecution was but Divine discipline. They would lose all the blessing of it if they resisted, repined, and let it make them feel hard and unloving. Better, far better, humble themselves under God's mighty hand; submit to His providential dealings; see how the afflictions and persecutions affected them all alike, rich and poor, and were designed to draw them into a nearer and more helpful brotherhood. One thing they could do, and it would bring them the best cheer in their time of trouble; forgetting their own dignities, they could "gird themselves with humility," and by love "serve one another." They could fill up their lives with the joy of Christlike service; and as for the cares, and anxieties, which persecutions might bring, or even this loving service of others might bring, they could cast all such cares on God, in the absolute confidence that He was caring for them. We may get St. Peter's counsel duly impressed upon our hearts, and with fitting applications to our own precise circumstances, if we consider (1) that the service of one another demands humility; (2) that the service of one another at once relieves from cares, and brings cares; (3) and that the cares which service brings, God bears with us.

I. **The service of one another demands humility.**—Our Lord's symbolic teachings in the upper room were called forth by the failure of His disciples to serve one another. Not one of them was willing to do the lowly, kindly service of washing the feet of the others. And their failure was due to their lack of humility. They were all self-interested; each had an exaggerated estimate of his own importance. In their self-consciousness and pride they had even been disputing as to which had the claim

to the most honourable offices in the kingdom which they expected to see so soon established. Each one thought he was a proper person to *be served*, and as long as each one thought so, he was not likely to demean himself *to serve*—certainly not in such lowly ways as washing feet. We can never serve one another while we keep up undue estimates of our own importance. The man who has to take care of his own dignity will never take care of anybody else's well-being. He is over-occupied. For those first disciples the object-lesson given them was a severe and searching one. The Master Himself, whose dignity was unquestionable, took a towel, and girded Himself, as if He were a servant, and cheerfully did a servant's work. He showed them that the humility which can serve is a distinguishing mark of true greatness, and is perfectly in harmony with the highest offices. Had He thought of what was due to Him, He never would have served humanity at the cost of self-sacrifice. Because He could humble Himself to serve humanity, therefore God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name. The idea—essential idea—of Christian discipleship is "service," because another essential idea of it is "humility." St. Augustine was right when he answered the question, "What is the chief grace of Christianity?" by saying at once "Humility." Humility is the most striking thing in a man's conversion. He is self-humbled in the conviction of sin; and he is self-humbled in being obliged to accept salvation as a gift of grace. And that humility is the rootage of the new regenerate character. As the new life unfolds, it will soon be evident how it brings a man into tender, sympathetic relations with his fellow-men, and inspires him to watch for and meet all opportunities of service. But let the new regenerate life fail to grow; let the old "self" come back, nourishing the old pride, and inevitably the interest in others declines, and a life of service begins to look mean and humiliating. "Gird yourselves with humility," and keep yourselves girded, and you will want to "serve one another." Undo that girdle, put it away from you, and then other people may wash disciples' feet—you won't. So far from helping disciples to serve one another, you will expect the disciples to serve you. It is a thing to set ever freshly before us, that we must be striving to gain *this* mind of Christ—the humility that loves to serve. St. Peter speaks of humility, in a figurative way, as a garment to be put on. The word here rendered "be clothed" is a very expressive one, being derived from κόμβος, a string, or band, with which a garment is fastened to the person; so that humility is to be put on as an outer dress, to ornament the wearer; and to be kept on (because tied in knots), and not merely to be worn on certain occasions." There is a secret in Christian humility. It is the attitude of a man among men who has humbled himself before God—humbled himself "under the mighty hand of God."

II. **The service of one another at once relieves us from cares and brings to us cares.**—It relieves us from the cares which come to us out of difficult and distressing circumstances. Many a Christian man has felt overwhelmed; every door has seemed shut up, every sphere over-weighted; every attempt results in failure, every prospect looks dark. Moved by the comforting Spirit, he just leaves it all, and goes out to *serve somebody*, to find some soul more sorely stricken than he is, and to cheer such a soul with the consolations of God. That man, in the service of another, finds his own cares relieved. What he has been saying, in his efforts to serve, has come right home to his own heart, and he returns upon his own cares, and they do not seem quite so heavy and so dark. He can almost be sure that there is a little break in the sky that is ushering in the dawn of a brighter day for *him*. What a cheer for his own sorrows St. Paul must have gained when he tried to serve the

sorrowing Corinthians! He speaks of the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." Many a Christian has been overwhelmed with *doubts*; has found himself questioning this and that, until the very foundations of truth seem to have given way, and he has not even a corner-stone left on which to rest a hope. He is a wise friend to the doubter who takes him away from study, and books, and thoughts; refuses to argue anything with him, but leads him out to the widowed, the fatherless, the sick, the lost, whom he may *serve*. The cares of doubt will soon be relieved, and charity will bring back faith. And there is a sense in which the cares of the spiritual life may be relieved by the humble serving of others. If we make attention to spiritual life too exclusive, we are sure to become morbid, full of moods, dependent on feelings, and insincere in reading our own experiences. It is the best relief to go and undertake some Christian work. Give up brooding over varying feelings, and go out and undertake some service of righteousness and charity. Never mind about spiritual emotions; they will take care of themselves. Become intensely anxious about good works; this good work, "by love serving one another." Many a young Christian has begun to keep a diary of his feelings, and kept on with it until he discovered that it was making him morbid and miserable; and then he flung the diary away for ever, let God take care of his feelings, and spent himself in active service—girded himself, and set himself to do the Christly work of "serving others." But it is also true that the service of others *brings cares*. It brings *their* cares upon us whom we serve, for all true service rests upon sympathy, upon fellow-feeling; and it means that we take the cares of others upon our own hearts and hands. But this is the holiest and most Christlike form that human care can take; and with absolute assurance of help, for us and for them, we may cast these cares of others upon God. But if we devote ourselves, in a generous spirit of self-denial, to the helping of others, we shall also find the service brings cares concerning ourselves. Oftentimes they will be cares taking form as *temptations*. It may be suggested to us that our lowly deeds may affect our reputations; our readiness to serve others may seem to prevent our getting on in life, and may even make earthly prosperity impossible. We may hear men saying of us, He is always looking after other people, but he never seems to look after himself. It is true that no man ever yet made himself poor by what he gave away for Christ's sake, and no man ever yet ruined his life-prospects by unselfish devotion to the service of others. A man may miss what he imagined for himself, or what others have hoped for him. That is very possible. But God stands by every Christly man; takes his *care* upon Himself, and sees that the man gains the "best of both worlds," just the best of both worlds *for him*. Does such care come pressing on any of you? Have you almost become convinced that a life of service cannot be a life of worldly success? Cast that care on God. I know how He will comfort you. He will say in your soul, "A life of service *is* a life of success." To serve is heaven. To serve is angelic. To serve is Christly. To serve is Divine. And to *be* heavenly, Christly, angelic, and close kin with God, *is success*.

III. **The cares which service brings, God bears with us.**—"For He careth for you." We dwell frequently on the delightful thought that God is concerned about us, and that His loving interest wraps us round, keeps us safe, and holds us up. But we do not so often see the limitation of the assurance. God careth for *you*, precisely you who are girding yourselves to serve one another, and find that various cares come to you as you render the

service. God careth for *you*, who have characters which find revealing expression in service. God is interested in *you*, and in yours, in your circumstances, but only in them for the sake of you. God cares for character. Do not in the least fear. God will take care of that. God will nourish that. God will reward that. Faithfully live out the Christian life, as a life of humility that loves to serve. Faithfully live it out, whatever it may seem to cost you, whatever loss it may seem to involve. Man may misread your life. He is very likely to do so. You may misread it yourselves. You are even more likely to so. But God makes no mistakes, and never misunderstands. He sees some doing service—washing disciples' feet—in a spirit of ostentation, and He turns away from the unlovely sight. He knows whether His servants are girded with humility for their service. He estimates the cares that come upon them, He cares for them. And His care has in it a purpose of infinite love. The care shines in the smile that cheers the workers. The care reaches down "everlasting arms" to uphold the workers. The care bids the angels keep ready the "many mansions," the resting places, until the day when those who have served others shall themselves be served. He shall bid them sit down to meat, and come forth Himself and serve them. Ministers, serving one another; casting all self cares on God, while we do His work, quite sure that He careth for us;—this many of us may have to *win*; this many of us may have to *keep*. "Gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another." And of this be quite sure, "He careth for you."

Ver. 5. *Humility.*—This was not a new word when the New Testament was written. It, or its Greek equivalent, was very common, but used only contemptuously and rebukingly. It always meant meanness of spirit. To be humble was to be a coward. It described a cringing soul. It was a word for slaves. Where could we find a more striking instance of the change that the Christian religion brought into the world than in the way in which it took this disgraceful word, and made it honourable? To be humble is to have a low estimation of one's self. That was considered shameful in the olden time. You insulted a man if you called him humble. It seemed to be inconsistent with that self-respect which is necessary to any good activity. Christ came, and made the despised quality the crowning grace of the culture that He inaugurated. The disgraceful word became the key-note of His fullest gospel. He redeemed the quality and straightway the name became honourable. What was the change that Christianity accomplished, and how did it come about? Humility means a low estimate or value of one's self. But all values are relative. The estimate we set on anything depends on the standard with which we compare it. And so values are always varying as the standard or the object with which you compare the thing that you are valuing changes. Christianity's great primary revelation was God. Much *about* Him it showed men, but first of all it showed them *Him*. He stood beside man's work. And God in the world must be the standard of the world. Greatness meant something different when men had seen how great He was; and the manhood which had compared itself with lesser men, and grown proud, now had a chance to match itself with God, and to see how small it was, and to grow humble about itself. It is wonderful how the smallest man can keep his self-complacency in the presence of the largest. But let that small man become a Christian; that means, let the narrow walls of his life be broken down, and let him see God, present here by Christ. At once, then, all is changed. It would be a fearful thing if the only thing that Christ showed us of God were His greatness. The pure humiliation would be too crushing. But the revelation is not only

this. It includes not only the greatness, but the love, of God. The majesty is that of a father, which takes our littleness into His greatness, makes it a part of itself, honours it, trains it, does not mock it; then there comes the true graciousness of humility. It is not less humble; but it is not crushed. The energy which the man used to get out of his estimate of his own greatness, he gets now out of the sight of his Father's, which yet is so near to him that, in some finer and higher sense, it still is his; and so he is more hopeful, and happy, and eager, in his humility than he ever used to be in his pride. The true way to be humble is not to stoop till you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your real height against some higher nature that shall show you what the real smallness of your greatest greatness is. The first is the unreal humility that goes about deprecating human nature; the second is the genuine humility that always stands in love and adoration, glorifying God. Christ also rescued and exalted humility by magnifying the essential glory of humanity. There never was any life that so superbly asserted the essential worth of humanity—showed what a surpassing thing it is to be a man—like that sin-convicting life of Jesus. He showed us that the human might be joined to the Divine. He glorified human nature, and by this glorification He taught man that it was his true place to be humble. There is nothing more strange, and at the same time more truthful, about Christianity than its combination of humility and exaltation for the soul of man. Christianity puts men face to face with the humbling facts, the great realities, and then humility comes upon the soul as darkness comes upon the face of the earth, not because the earth has made up its mind to be dark, but because it has rolled into the great shadow.—*Phillips Brooks.*

Vers. 6, 7. *Perfect for Service.*—The "captain of our salvation" was "made perfect through sufferings." "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." If we would be like Him in His glory, we must first be like Him in His sufferings. Good things come after trouble. It is well to try and look upon life aright before we are forced to do so by the pressure of outward misery. We are to imitate Christ, so far as it is possible, in the particular sort of employment which He chose—namely, in the mixing with other men; neither for business only—that is, in the way of our calling; nor yet for pleasure only—that is, in common society; but for charity in its largest sense—that is, from a desire to do good to the bodies or souls of others. This Christ-like employment is most suited to our state on earth, and especially helps us to make that state happy, by enabling us to rid it of its carefulness. Half, and more than half, of the practical faults in the world arise from looking upon life in a false view, and expecting from it what God does not mean us to find in it. He to whom all things future are as present, suited both His life and His words to what He knew would be ever the chief error of mankind. He knew that social and civil activity were sufficiently natural to man to need no encouragement. He knew that knowledge would be pursued, and arts and sciences cultivated. But He knew that the kingdom of God and His righteousness would not be sought after; He knew that men would look carefully enough on the things of this life, but would care for little beyond it. He therefore made that so valuable which could help us forward to our real and eternal life, and that so trifling, when received in faith, which can but give joy and sorrow for a moment. Life is before us as a trial-time of uncertain length, in which we may fit ourselves, if we will, for an eternal life beyond it. We may be thankful to God when He makes our training for eternity consist in the doing great and useful actions, in bringing forth much fruit; but we, each of us, are doing our

business as thoroughly, are answering as completely the purposes for which *we* were sent into the world, if we are laid for years on a bed of sickness, and made incapable of action. It is not true that our great business or object in this world is to do all the good we can in it; our great business and object is to do God's will, and so to be changed through His Spirit into His image that we may be fit to live with Him for ever. His will is declared to us by the course of His providence, putting us into different situations of life where different duties are required of us. But these duties are duties because they are His will; and if performed without reference to Him, however good our motives may be, the great business of life is left undone. To keep this end in view is a wonderful means of ridding life of its carefulness. If simply to be useful in our generation be our main object, our happiness cannot but greatly depend upon outward circumstances. Weakened health, and early death, spoil usefulness. When we recollect what is indeed our real business here, we cast at once all our care on God, and resign ourselves contentedly to His disposal. It is with reference to this view of life especially that Christ's particular employment, the mixing with others, not for business, or for pleasure, but to do them good, is so exceedingly useful. It is surprising how much pleasure may be given every day, how much suffering relieved, and how much good done. But how can we secure such a life? We may not be able to imitate Christ exactly in this point, but we must find opportunity to do sometimes what He did always. In every station or employment, we must find opportunity, or make it, if we would not deprive ourselves of what may well be called the path of daily living. And God will enable us to make a great deal even of our common intercourse with others; and here we all have our opportunities, unless we choose to neglect them. Such, then, is Christ's daily lesson to us; not to be idle or slothful in our work; and to sanctify it all by doing it as to Him, and not to man.—*Thomas Arnold, D.D.*

Ver. 7. *Casting Care.*—This familiar verse is more suggestive studied in its connection. The apostle is commending the great grace of Christian humility; first on the younger members of the Church in all their relations with the elder, and then on all the members in their various Church relations. Then follows this striking expression: "Be clothed with humility," or "Gird yourselves with humility." The picture presented to us is that of the Eastern gentleman, whose long, loose, and flowing garments are not held in place, or properly set off, until the handsome folded girdle is skilfully adjusted about the loins. St. Peter would remind us that there is a dress of Christian graces with which we should be clothed; but the various graces will not take orderly forms and relations, nor will they be complete, unless we are girded about with the sweet grace of Christian humility. Then the apostle reminds us that there is a foundation humility upon which our humble relations one with another must depend. It is the humbling of the *self* before God. Our text, taken with the immediately previous sentence, reminds us that the same truth may need setting in different forms, in order to meet the needs of various classes of persons. There are strong, energetic persons, who need to have truth stated strongly, and in tones of command. To them St. Peter says, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God." But there are also gentle souls, to whom the truth comes most effectively when it sounds like a "still small voice," and falls like the night dews. To meet their case St. Peter repeats his command; and now it is, "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." Humble souls find it easy to "cast their care." They who can "cast their care" must be humble.

I. **Think of man's care.**—"All your care." By "care" is meant "anxiety"

rather than "affliction." Anxiety suggests the daily worry, the care about a thousand things. Care arises from: 1. Our frequent misunderstandings with our fellow-men. It comes because we persist in estimating things from our own points of view. 2. Our business and family claims. For these we need the word "harassed." 3. Our religious claims. There should be grave anxiety as to the spirit of our life, and the tone of our example. And there should be constant watchfulness to find out, and willingness to respond to, all the reasonable demands made on our time or on our money.

II. **Think of God's care.**—"He careth for you." One is surprised to find the same word used for God as for ourselves. His care cannot be quite like ours. There can be no fretfulness, no worry, in it. 1. See His care of all the creatures He has made. 2. His precise knowledge of our anxieties. 3. His care *of us* in the midst of our anxieties.

III. **God's care of us is a persuasion to cast our care on Him.**—"For." He cares; then why should we? He is able; He is wise; He knows all; He loves with an everlasting love; He is our Father. Why should we not be as calm as the sailor boy in the wild storm, who knew that his father held the helm? If we would see precisely what is meant by "casting our care on God," let us think of the prophet lifting up holy hands, and saying that most full, most touching, of all Bible prayers, "O Lord, I am oppressed; *undertake Thou for me.*" Is this "casting care" difficult? It is life's great lesson. Yokes cease to rub and press when God bears them with us. Crosses are lightened when God bears them with us. And He always takes the heavier end. Some, however, do not know God well enough to trust Him thus simply, thus perfectly. Of all the burdens He would have cast upon Him, the first is that of the unpardoned soul. That! Yes; that greatest of all our cares we may "roll off" on Him "who careth for us."

The Care of One Who Loves.—The care which God has is the care of one who loves, and therefore takes on his own heart the troubles of his beloved one. And what does He do with our care when thus we cast it upon Him? He does not take it and put it right away, hiding it for ever from our view. We wish He would do that. He does something altogether better. He takes the burden of care and puts it gently back on our shoulders, saying, "Remember, it is *My* care now; it is *yours* no longer. And now I want you to carry it for Me." Then the yoke feels easy, and the burden is light.

Human Cares and the Divine Care.—The value of the injunction in the former half of the text depends entirely upon its latter half. For until we can get men to believe in the care of God for them, we shall never persuade them to cast all their care upon Him. It must be confessed, however, that it is not easy for any of us adequately to realise what these words, "He careth for you," mean.

I. **There are those who declare that the words have no meaning.**—They see no "He" in the universe. True, they speak of nature with reverence, and in terms so warmly personal that we are sometimes tempted to think that their science has found what their faith had lost; but, if we may trust their own assertions, it is not so, for they find no evidence in nature of a living God. No man can cast his care upon an It. The materialists' creed fosters an inhuman quite as much as an ungodly type of character. If ever the presence of care becomes too heavy for him to bear it alone, one of two results will follow: either the creed will break down, or the man will. Hence suicide is so often the consequence of atheism.

II. **We may find it difficult to realise that God really cares for us.**—

1. *Easier to believe that He cares for the universe at large, than that He takes any interest in us as individuals.* Too prone to think of Him as exercising some kind of care over us, as a general does over his troops. He is not a general, but a Father. To rightly understand this text we must read, "He cares for *me*"; or, 2. *Some one may say, "I cannot think God cares very much for me, or He would not allow me to suffer as I do, and give me this weary burden of care to bear day by day."* Like a child complaining of having hard lessons to learn. Very often trials and anxieties are the pledge and token of God's love. If we had no care we might begin to doubt whether God cared for us.

III. **If we lift the burden of our care at all we are to lift it for the last time, that we may cast it upon God.**—Once there, it becomes God's care, not ours. Because God cares for us, He will care for it.

IV. **The little word "all" includes even the trivial and passing anxieties of each day.**—To suppose that some cares are too insignificant to take to God in prayer is not to honour Him, but unnecessarily to burden ourselves. It has been said that "white ants pick a carcase quicker and cleaner than a lion does"; and so these little cares may even more effectually destroy our peace than a single great trouble if, in our mistaken reverence for God's greatness, we refuse to cast them upon Him. *G. S. Barrett, B.A.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8, 9.

The Common Enemy.—The figures in this passage are evidently suggested to St. Peter's mind by his reference to shepherds and shepherding, and by his conception of the Church as the "flock of God." "These are the sudden cries ('be sober, be vigilant'), of warning from a shepherd to the other shepherds, who spies the lion prowling round the flock in the darkness, while the guardians of the flock lie drowsy and asleep." Whether St. Peter is to be understood as affirming the existence of a personal devil, or as speaking here in a figurative manner, personifying the calamities and evils which were proving such serious temptations to the Christians of the Dispersion, need not be decided. Evil, taking form as disability, reproach, and persecution, is a distinctly active and mischievous force; it was seriously imperilling the Christian faith and life of the disciples, and precisely what they had to watch against was the subtle and constant and varied influences of these calamities and anxieties. They resisted the devil by resisting the things which were his agencies.

I. **Temptations of evil are always on the watch for opportunities.**—To impress this fact the figure of the prowling wild beast is taken.

II. **Temptations of evil are always active.**—This is said to impress the necessity of wakefulness. The Christian while on earth is always on the battle-field, in face of the enemy. All are subject to some kind of suffering.

III. **Temptations of evil always work with a bad design.**—What they want to devour is the faith which is the very foundation of Christian life. When there is so much to bear, it is hard to keep trust in God.

IV. **Temptations of evil must be met by a watchfulness and activity greater than that which they exhibit.**—"Whom withstand, stedfast in your faith." Steady; ever ready, clothed in the whole armour of God.

V. **Temptations of evil made the same trouble and conflict for our fathers.**—It is but a common lot. Our fathers conquered, so may we; our Divine Lord and Master conquered, so may we, in His strength.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Vers. 8, 9. *Malign Spiritual Influences.*—Man's soul carries in it the elements of all good, and of all evil—for every faculty has its good and its evil side, its temperate and its excessive use; and there is no outward evil in the world which is not made so by something which represents it in man. There is no evil under the general designation of *sin*, which has not its origin within. There is that in man which answers to whatever is good and whatever is evil. This is itself a sufficient reason for forethought and for vigilance. But the sacred Scripture declares that there is a power of temptation in evil spirits; that man, in this mortal state, is surrounded by a sphere filled with spirits that are perpetually tempting him to evil. Many, indeed, disbelieve in spirit agency. It is inconsistent with their conception of a benevolent God, that He should permit a devil to exist. Inquire into the nature of this influence called *temptation*. Temptation holds a parallel and analogic course with inspiration. It is simply a stimulus, coming from wherever it may, applied to a faculty, or to classes of faculties, in the human mind—faculties of which men have, or should have, *might* have, full control. Temptation never works out anything. It merely gives impulse, suggestion, stimulus. If any evil is wrought out through you, *you* work it out wholly and absolutely. If, being impelled, men do evil, as when, being impelled, they do right, the right or the wrong is their own act, for which they are responsible. For, although they were pushed to it, tempted to it, they had plenary power to do it or not to do it. No man, therefore, is carried away under temptation or by temptation. Many men carry themselves away. No man is overborne by temptation in any literal sense, although figuratively the language is employed properly enough. Temptation does not destroy self-control. It may intensify its difficulty, but it does not invalidate plenary power. The strength of the temptation lies wholly in the faculty which it tempts. Temptation goes with the strongest faculties. See some of the conditions of mind which make temptations by evil natures fatal and dangerous. Every right and good tendency of the soul draws to itself food for goodness. A good man attracts goodness, and is sensitive to goodness. The better you are, the more qualities there are in life helping you to be good. It is easy to be good, after you have received impulsion towards goodness. A bad man finds that which is bad. He carries it with him. An irritable man finds not only irritable men, but occasions for irritability. Selfishness finds everywhere occasions for selfishness. The moral condition which you carry into life constitutes the first great ground of susceptibility to inspiration on the side of good, and to temptation on the side of evil. To this must be added the want of fixed and ruling purposes by which you meet and resist evil tendencies. There is much in life that is easily overcome, if there be a positive and steadfast resistance to it. But if we are languid, if we are pulseless, we become a prey to it. Physicians tell us that there is such a thing as predisposition to epidemic. Also the habit of doing wrong makes it more sure that temptations will be victorious over men. And the social element enhances the power of temptation. Consider, then, how many adversaries are moving upon every single point of your nature. Consider what special temptations, over and above the general tenor of society, are marching out upon you from your business. Consider, too, all the temptations which spring upon you from individual men. Consider the evil fellowship which you have in the company in which you go at large. Consider that you have secret and open sins, which are themselves

like cancers draining the body of its strength and stamina, and eating at the very vitals. Upon all these temptations there descends that malign influence which sweeps in from the great spirit-world, against which God bids us take heed.—*H. Ward Beecher.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 10—14.

Soul-Strength out of Life-Strain.—"The God of all grace . . . shall Himself perfect, stablish, strengthen you."

I. **God can.**—For He is the God of all grace.

II. **God meant to.**—For He called you with that very purpose in view.

III. **God does.**—For the present stablishing is with a view to future perfecting.

IV. **God is keeping on doing.**—Though He may be pleased to put the completion, the perfecting of His work into the future, and make you wait awhile, and make the waiting time a time of sore trial, of this you may be absolutely assured, there is some needs be for the delay; but the work is in steady progress, all through the time of delay, and the issue will be in every way higher and better because of the delay. We have to suffer awhile, and God knows best how long the "while" should be.

The Promise.—"He Himself" is the emphatic language of the apostle here; for from the same fountain of grace as the call to eternal glory came, will come all the gifts essential to its attainment.

I. **He will perfect you.**—The believer is at first, and for a while, very deficient in many respects—in wisdom, prudence, charity, patience, and all other virtues of the Christian character. Must those defects remain in him? and must he carry them to the grave? No; ere he enters the "eternal glory" he must be blameless, harmless, and without rebuke, and therefore made perfect in every good word and work. He cannot, however, make himself perfect. God must do it; and He will do it, never leaving His servant until He has done for him all that He has promised.

II. **He will stablish you, or make you fast.**—"He set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings," said David; and Jesus said to Peter, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." There are Christians who, when the storm sets in, are like trees which wave to and fro in the wind, and which, having but a slender hold of the soil, are in danger of being blown down; but God can give them such support that they shall be like majestic oaks that defy the fiercest blast, or like a lighthouse on a rock that stands unmoved amid the billows of the raging sea.

III. **He will strengthen you.**—For ordinary warfare, bodily strength is necessary; for the warfare in which the Christian is engaged, spiritual strength is essential. A feeble, timid Christian will fly before the enemy, but one who is strong in the Lord and in the power of His might will go and meet him with all confidence. And God gives strength to His people. They are strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, and when temptation comes they are able to resist it, and in every conflict they come off victorious.

IV. **He will settle you.**—The word θεμελιώσαι means He will ground, or fix you, as on a sure foundation, so that, like a mighty fortress, you shall stand unmoved, even though assailed by hosts of foes. A precious promise this; for our enemies sometimes come upon us like an army set in array, threatening to storm a citadel, and to take possession of it by force. But our citadel will prove too strong for them, and they shall be driven back, like the armies of Sennacherib when they threatened to invade the Holy City. In these several words there is

a striking rise and development. The believer's character is first perfected, then he becomes firm in the faith; he is then strengthened to endure the assaults of the foe, and then he becomes settled or made fast, and is as a tower of strength which none of his enemies can shake.—*Thornley Smith.*

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 10. *Stablished, Strengthened, Settled.*—The word "settled" is sometimes used in describing a building which comes to rest securely on its foundations. In common phraseology we speak of the "settling" of a house when the structure consolidates and comes to abide surely and immovably in its place. It takes years, in some instances, for that process to complete itself; and, as it goes on, flaws are discovered, and rents are sometimes made, showing clearly where the strength of the house lies—not in the mere walls, but in that firm foundation on which they rest, and on which the several parts settle themselves broadly and wholly. We cannot but remember in this connection the one ultimate foundation of a sinner's trust, other than which no man can lay—Jesus Christ, and the truth as it is in Him; and that the whole great process of Christian life and education is with a view to solidify the trust, and fix the faith immovably on Him. God's first work in a man is largely potential. He builds the framework of a new life. He gives enough, *when used*, to supply all the need. Yet, when the need arises, it is many a time very great. Through hunger, and thirst, and weariness, and storm, and battle, the soul makes way—often apparently with extremest difficulty — "troubled on every side, perplexed, persecuted, cast down"—bearing about in the body the death-pains of the Son of God. But lo! by means of all this searching and conflict and endeavour, there comes by degrees the growing fulness of the better life. Temptation brings increase of strength; assaults of the enemy, repulsed, give new courage; change carries away many a treasure, but, to fill the void, brings ever more and more of the "unsearchable riches." Castles in the air, built on vain confidence, melt from the sight, and the heart, convinced of its folly, comes to rest, with a child's simplicity of trust, and yet with a man's certainty of conviction, on Him who is able to keep that which is committed to Him, and is "stablished, strengthened, settled," at last. It is literally *at last* with many a one. The final settlement is often just before the dying. It sometimes takes God a lifetime to teach us to flee from false refuges—to teach us to be humble, and to trust entirely in His Son, and in His own love, as brought near in Him. From many a pale, bloodless face there looks out at length the calmness, almost celestial, of a perfect trust. On many a dying bed you see the features which have been seamed and scarred and almost worn away by earthly care, and by spiritual sorrow and fear, which seemed, never-ending, smoothed at last into a serenity and a beauty caught directly from heaven. And from many a low voice, sinking into the last murmurs, you might, if you were near, catch the whisper of the departing one: "I am at peace now; 'settled' at last!" We may all have "settlement" in Christ; it is intended and promised that we should have it, if we will, before the end of life comes. God grant that, if we have not this good thing earlier, we may all have it then.—*A. Raleigh, D.D.*

Ver. 12. *The True Grace of God.*—St. Peter affirms that, no matter what disabilities may attach to their Christian profession, it was the true grace of God in which they stood, and in it they must still stand steadfast. "The position they now occupied was one which the favour of God had brought them into." The expression, the "true grace of God," may be opened and illustrated in

three relations. 1. True grace regarded as Revelation—in the Son. 2. True grace regarded as Redemption—in the self-sacrifice of the Son. 3. True grace regarded as Sanctification—in the power of the suffering innocence of the Son.

The Gospel of the Grace of God.—1. That the economy of the gospel is, throughout its constitution and influences, a grand display of Divine grace. (1) The announcements of the gospel, as to the methods by which blessings are meritoriously secured. (2) The influence by which blessings are actually imparted. (3) The nature of those blessings themselves. (4) The extent to which these blessings are to be diffused. 2. That the economy of the gospel, as such, impresses important demands on all to whom it is proclaimed. (1) It should be cordially believed. (2) It must be steadfastly adhered to. (3) It must be zealously diffused.—*James Parsons.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER V.

Ver. 7. *God's Love Inexhaustible.*—Suppose a meadow in which a million of daisies open their bosoms, all at one time, to the sun. On one of them, while it was yet a bud, a little stone has fallen. At once crushed and overshadowed, it still struggles bravely against all odds to expand its petals like the rest. For many days this effort is continued without success. The tiny stone, a mighty rock to the tiny flower, squats on its breast, and will not admit a single sunbeam. At length the flower-stalk, having gathered strength by its constant exertion, acquired force enough to overbalance the weight, and tossed the intruder off. Up sprang the daisy with a bound; and in an instant another floweret was added to the vast multitude which in that meadow drank their fill of sunlight. The sun in heaven was not incommoded by the additional demand. The new-comer received into its open cup as many sunbeams as it would have received although no other flower had grown in all the meadow—in all the earth. Thus the sun, finite though it be, helps us to understand the absolute infinitude of its Maker. When an immortal being, long crushed and turned away by a load of sin, at length, through the power of a new spiritual life, throws off the burden, and opens with a bound to receive a heavenly Father's long-offered but rejected love, the Giver is not impoverished by the new demand upon His kindness. Although a thousand millions should arise and go to the Father, each would receive as much of that Father's love as if he alone of all fallen creatures had come back reconciled to God.—*Rev. William Arnot.*

Providential Care.—When a child (says Mrs. Mary Winslow, in her diary, then Mary Forbes) I accompanied my parents, during the French war, on a visit to England. Our vessel was a light barque, carrying a few guns, and but ill furnished for severe conflict with the enemy. On entering the Channel, midway between the English and French coast, a ship of war bore in sight. It was toward night, and as she appeared to bear down upon us, our captain prepared for action. My mother and I were hurried from the cabin to what was thought a place of greater safety below. My father remained on deck. All was confusion above us, while I was astonished at being thus suddenly removed from my comfortable berth to the dismal quarters beneath the decks. We had not been long there when I observed a boy come occasionally to the place of our imprisonment, and, with a large horn in his hand, take something from out of a barrel, having first fixed a lighted candle upon its edge, and leaving it there. Observing, as I sat upon my mother's lap—who was too much absorbed in anxiety to notice the circumstance—that the piece of candle was nearly burnt to the edge, I got down, put out my hand, and took it away, saying, "Mamma, this will burn the barrel." It was a cask of gunpowder. Had I not removed it that moment, or in removing it had a spark fallen from the lengthened wick, the vessel and all on board must have been blown to atoms.

God's Care of His servants.—Paul Gerhard was, many years ago, a great preacher in Brandenburg, Germany, and he loved to preach from his heart what he saw and believed in the Word of God. But the "Great Elector" of Brandenburg did not like his preaching, and sent to say to him, "Paul Gerhard, if you cannot preach differently from that, you must leave this country." Gerhard sent back a message that it would be very hard to leave his home, his people, his country, and his livelihood; but he could only preach what he found in God's Word, and as long as he lived he would preach that. So he had to go into banishment with his wife and little children. At the end of

the first day's journey they came into a wood, and rested at night at a little inn they found there. The little children were crying and clinging to their mother, and she too, who had kept up all day, now began to weep. This made Gerhard have a very heavy heart. So he went alone into the dark wood to think and pray. While he was in the wood this text came to his mind and comforted him: "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass." "Yes," he thought, "though I am banished from house and home, and don't know where to take my wife and children for shelter to-morrow, yet God, my God, sees me in this dark wood. Now is the time to trust Him. He will show me the way through. He will bring it to pass.'" He was so happy that he remembered that text, and so thankful to God, that he tried to make the text into a hymn as he paced up and down between the trees. Every verse begins with a word or two from the text, so that if you read the first words of each verse you just read the text. When he went into the house he told his wife about the text, and began to repeat to her his hymn. She soon dried her tears (the children had already gone to sleep), and become as hopeful and trustful as Gerhard himself. They had scarcely retired to rest when they heard a great noise at the door. It seemed as though some important person were knocking there. When the landlord opened the door, a man on horseback said aloud, "I am a messenger. I come from Duke Christian of Merseberg, and I am in search of Paul Gerhard. Do you know whether he has passed this way?" "Paul Gerhard," said the landlord. "Yes, he is in this house." "Then let me see him instantly," said the Duke's messenger. And the messenger handed to the good man a large sealed letter. It came from the Duke Christian, and it said, "Come into my country, Paul Gerhard, and you shall have church, and people, and home, and livelihood, and liberty to preach the gospel to your heart's content. Gerhard's hymn commenced thus:—

"'Commit thy way,' O weeper,
The cares that fret thy soul,
To thine Almighty Keeper,
Who makes the world to roll;

"'Unto the Lord,' who guideth
The wind and cloud and sea;
Oh, doubt not, He provideth
A pathway, too, for thee."

Ver. 13. *The Church at Babylon.*—The rendering of this verse in our Authorised Version probably results from the old ecclesiastical figment that Peter was founder and Bishop of the Roman Church, and that he here says Babylon mystically for Rome. But for the influence of this idea it is improbable that our translators would have supplemented the verse by introducing the word "Church." Neander renders it, "Syneclecte, who is at Babylon, greets you, and so does my son Marcus." By Syneclecte he understands Peter's wife, whom here he mentions by name. That he was married we learn from Matt. viii. 14. That his wife accompanied him on his journeys is implied in Paul's language, 1 Cor. ix. 5, "Have not I a right to take a believing wife (ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα) with me on my journeys, like . . . Cephas?" Neander quotes Clem. Alex. Strom., to the effect that Peter, seeing his wife led by to martyrdom, called to her by name, and said, "Oh, remember the Lord." I can hardly think, however, that Neander is right in his idea that Syneclecte is a proper name. Probably the word should be translated. Its equivalent would be some such phrase as "your sister in the faith." The verse would then read, "Your sister in the faith, who is at Babylon, salutes you, and so does my son Marcus." This, of course, would leave Neander's view of the passage untouched, that it is his wife and son, then with him at Babylon, who send greetings, and not the Church.—*Baptist Magazine.*

Babylon.—Three places have claimed to be understood under this name: 1. A little place called Babylon in Egypt, which has nothing to plead for itself except the unlikelihood of St. Peter ever being at the Oriental Babylon, coupled with the difficulty of supposing that the name is used quite figuratively. Perhaps, also, we should mention the traditional connection of St. Mark with Egypt. No one now, however, maintains this view. 2. The literal Babylon in the East. This has for itself the simple way in which St. Peter uses the word, without any circumlocution. But it has nothing else for it to set against all the overwhelming arguments in favour of the third claimant; besides which we learn from Josephus of a great expulsion of Jews from the Oriental Babylon a few years before this date. These Jews might, of course, however, have gathered there again, as they did at Rome, in spite of frequent expulsions. 3. It may be called the established interpretation that the place meant Rome. We never hear of St. Peter's being in the East, and the thing in itself is improbable, whereas nothing but Protestant prejudice can stand against the historical evidence that St. Peter sojourned and died at Rome. Whatever theological consequences may flow from it, it is as certain that St. Peter was at Rome as that St. John was in Ephesus. Everything in the letter also points to such a state of things as was to be found at Rome about the date when we believe the letter to have been written. It is objected that St. Peter would not gravely

speak of Rome under a fanciful name when dating a letter; but the symbolism in the name is quite in keeping with the context. St. Peter has just *personified* the Church of the place from which he writes, which seems quite as unprosaic a use of language as to call Rome "Babylon." And it seems pretty clear that the name was quite intelligible to Jewish readers, for whom it was intended. The Apocalypse (xvii. 18) is not the only place where Rome is found spoken of under this title. One of the first of living Hebraists told the present writer that no Hebrew of St. Peter's day would have had need to think twice what city was meant, when "Babylon" was mentioned. And on the mention of the name all the prophecies of the vengeance to be taken on the city which had desolated the Holy Land would rush with consolation into the minds of the readers, and they would feel that St. Peter, though supporting St. Paul, was still in full sympathy with themselves. Finally, as M. Renan suggests, there were reasons of prudence for not speaking too plainly about the presence of a large Christian society in Rome. The police were still more vigilant now than when St. Paul wrote in guarded language about the Roman Empire to the Thessalonians. It might provoke hostilities if the epistle fell into the hands of a *delator*, with names and places too clearly given.—*A. J. Mason, M.A.*

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PETER.

INTRODUCTION.

DEPRECATING the use of extravagant language concerning the consequences of rejecting St. Peter's authorship of this epistle, the *Rev. A. Plummer, M.A.*, has the following useful passage in "Ellicott's Commentary."

"The question of the genuineness of the epistle is one of immense interest and of no small importance; but there is no terrible alternative before us. If, after all, we have to admit that the epistle is possibly, or probably, or certainly not the work of St. Peter, the spiritual value of the contents, both in themselves and in having received the stamp of the Church as canonical, will remain absolutely unchanged; although, possibly, our own views of God's providence in relation to the canon of Scripture may require re-consideration and re-adjustment. This, however, is but the common experience, both of the individual and of the race. Men's views of God's dealings with them are ever needing re-adjustment, as He hides and manifests Himself in history; for His ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts."

In the time of Eusebius this epistle was classed among the disputed books. The first definite references to it are not found before Origen, in the third century. There is manifest difference in style, subject-matter, and persons addressed, between it and the earlier epistle. The similarity between 2 Peter ii. 1-19, and Jude verses 3-16, suggests copying one from the other; and probably Peter from Jude. The epistle was received as in the canon at the Council of Laodicea (372 A.D.), and the Council of Carthage (397 A.D.).

The object of the epistle is twofold (chap. iii. 17, 18): 1. That the readers might believe, lest, being led away with the error of the wicked, they should fall from their steadfastness. 2. That they might grow in grace and the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour; this last being the final aim of the whole, as the one means of fellowship with God, of escape from the pollutions of the world, and of access into the Divine kingdom.

There is no reference in the epistle to dangers from without affecting the Churches in the way of persecution. The dangers dealt with are those which arise from (1) the encouragement to evil living given by false teachers, and (2) from disbelief of the Lord's coming.

Canon Maclear, D.D., says that "its style differs considerably from that of the earlier epistle," a fact which, as St. Jerome tells us, weighed with those who rejected it, and which he accounted for by supposing that different "interpreters" or secretaries were employed. It has a greater unity of thought. It is more elegant, and comes nearer to having a Greek air about it.

Analysis of the Contents.

The writer salutes those who have like faith with himself in the righteousness of their God and Saviour. He exhorts them to growth and fruitfulness in the knowledge of Christ. He lays down the grounds on which this knowledge rests, in the testimony of apostles and the word of prophecy. He describes the erroneous teachers who were about to arise, their unholy practices, and the destruction sure to come upon them, as of old. He rejects the scoffers who deny Christ's coming. He exhorts believers in view of the Lord's coming.—*From "The Comprehensive Teachers' Helps."*

CHAPTER I.

INSPIRATION TO CHRISTIAN GROWTH.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1. **Simon.**—The Greek MSS. give Symeon; see Acts xv. 14. **A servant and an apostle**—Compare 1 Peter i. 1, "an apostle," and Jude verse 1, "a servant." **Like precious faith.**—See 1 Pet. i. 7, 19. This appears to be addressed to Gentile Christians, as called to share in Christian privilege with the Jews. **Through.**—*ἐν*; inclusive; that by which they were surrounded, the element of their spiritual existence. "In the justifying grace," the righteousness which God has provided for us in Christ. **God and our Saviour.**—Not as two persons. *τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος.* The single article *τοῦ* applies to both *Θεοῦ* and *σωτῆρος*: "Our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ."

Ver. 2. Knowledge.—*ἐπιγνώσει.* Increasing—ever-increasing—knowledge; see chap. iii. 18. **Our Lord.**—That is, of Jesus *as* our Lord.

Ver. 3. **Divine power.**—*τῆς θείας δυνάμεως.* The personification of this means the power of the Holy Spirit, who is personally the author of the new creation. **Life and godliness.**—The new soul-life, and its fitting expression in earthly life and relations. Godliness is a tone and character on conduct. **To glory and virtue.**—Margin R.V. "*by* His own glory and virtue." By the exercise of the same attributes to which we are to refer our call.

Ver. 4. **Exceeding great.**—*τὰ μέγιστα*: the greatest, as concerning the greatest things. **Partakers of the Divine nature.**—Compare 1 Pet. i. 23. "A participation in the moral perfections and communicable attributes of the Godhead." The Christian is thought of as receiving, upon faith, a new, Divine life, which makes him kin with God.

Ver. 5. **Beside this.**—"Yea, and for this very cause," "on this very account." **Diligence.**—Or earnestness; putting heart into effort. **Add.**—Better as R.V., "in your faith supply." *Adding to* is not the idea of the Greek. "Each element of the Christian life is to be as an instrument by which that which follows is wrought out." **Knowledge.**—Here, "moral discernment."

Ver. 6. **Temperance.**—General self-management. **Patience.**—As self-control in temper. **Godliness.**—The right tone on all conduct; or it may mean, as it certainly includes, right disposition towards God.

Ver. 7. **Charity.**—*τὴν ἀγάπην*, general and universal love for men as men.

Ver. 8. **Barren,** etc.—*ἀργοὺς*, idle, not using effort; *ἀκάρπους*, not attaining results. **Knowledge.**—See vers. 2, 3.

Ver. 9. **Blind.**—Self-blinded, closing his eyes to the light. *μυωπάζων*, contracting the eyelids, as one who cannot see clearly. **Was purged.**—And therefore stands pledged to the new life.

Ver. 10. **Never fall.**—Better, "stumble." A step short of falling. "The man who has acquired these graces has his path freed from many stumbling-blocks, and his vision cleared to see and avoid the rest."

Ver. 11. Ends the first main section of the epistle.

Ver. 12. **Present truth.**—Not some particular phase of truth, but the truth which you have and hold.

Ver. 14. **Showed me.**—The reference cannot be to John xxi. 18, as John's gospel was written later than the epistle. It may, however, be to the incident narrated in that gospel.

Ver. 16. **Fables.**—Legends, myths. With special reference to the narrative of the marvels of the Transfiguration. **Coming.**—Whether this looks backward or onward is not quite clear. It is best limited to the Transfiguration. **Eyewitnesses.**—And so have a personal sense-testimony to render.

Ver. 19. **Word of prophecy.**—Not probably to be confined to things foretold. Remember how, in his addresses, and in his first epistle, St. Peter freely made appeal to Old-Testament Scriptures as proving or supporting his teachings. It is important to realise how devout Jews regarded the Old Testament.

Ver. 20. **Private interpretation.**—*Special.* Those who interpreted must no more be self-willed than those who wrote. No man wrote save in the power of the Holy Ghost, and no man must venture to interpret save in the same power of the Holy Ghost.

Ver. 21. Render, "But being borne on by the Holy Ghost, men spake from God." The idea is that men did not speak out of their own hearts, but as they were commissioned by God. St. Peter's anxiety concerns the mischievous, self-willed influence of the false teachers, with whom he is about to deal in the next chapter.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1—4.

Christian Provisions, Privileges, and Promises.—The first epistle of Peter was directly addressed to the "elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion," in the provinces of Asia Minor, but there is no such limitation in the second epistle, which has a general character, and a wider application to all who share in the "common faith."

I. **The person who writes.**—The authorship of St. Peter has been disputed, but the difficulties of the denial of his authorship are greater than those which connect with its acceptance. The Petrine character of both the thoughts and the language is evident to every unprejudiced reader, and the differences may find a simple and natural explanation in the supposition of a different amanuensis. The Greek form of the name Symeon is to be preferred here. In the opening words of the first epistle, St. Peter does but call himself "an apostle of Jesus Christ"; but in this epistle he imitates St. Paul, and unites the terms—"servant and apostle" (Rom. i. 1; Phil. i. 1; Tit. i. 1). The word "servant" carries the more precise meaning of "bond-servant," or "slave." The union of the two terms suggests the union of *service* with *authority*, which was the characteristic of the apostleship. The service of the Lord Jesus, to which St. Peter was bound, was the service to the people which the Lord Jesus wanted to have rendered. And the authority was not a merely official right, but that kind of authority which is always given by first, precise, and complete personal knowledge. Apostolic authority is indicated in 1 John i. 1. These are the permanent features of all healthy Christian ministry. It is the service of men, because the heart is loyal and devoted to the service of Christ. It is service with the authority that comes with first hand, full, and precise knowledge, more especially when it is the knowledge of personal experience.

II. **The persons addressed.**—"Them that have obtained a like precious faith with us." Sharers in a faith which is not said to be always the same in character, but which always had the same quality and the same object. "All believed the same precious mysteries." We need not think that St. Peter refers exclusively to the apostles. It would be quite in harmony with his manner to refer to the association of the Gentiles with the Jews in the Christian faith. He himself had opened the door to the Gentiles, and they had become fellow-heirs with the Jews in Christian privilege. The object of faith is not here said to be the person of Christ. It is a characteristic of St. Peter that he traced salvation back to God, as its first cause, and regarded Christ as the Mediator, or agent, by whom the Divine purpose was outwrought (see 1 Pet. i. 21). The expression, "the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ," sets before us God's righteousness in saving men from their sins by Jesus Christ, which is the final object of faith, and which the apostle Paul so fully dwells upon. (Some writers suggest that the righteousness here referred to is only "fairness" in giving gospel privilege to Jew and Gentile alike.)

III. **The blessing invoked.**—"Peace be unto you!" is the familiar Jewish blessing. "Grace and peace" is the characteristic Christian blessing. The addition of the word "grace" brings in the gospel peculiarity. To all men God gives "peace"; on sinful men He bestows His grace. "By grace are ye saved." This is familiar; but the peculiarity of St. Peter's blessing lies in his idea of the way in which the "grace and peace" will come to us. It is through *knowledge*. Not, of course, mere head-knowledge. Experimental knowledge. The Petrine setting reminds us of the remarkable words of our Lord's intercessory prayer: "And this is life eternal, that they should know Thee the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ."

IV. **The provisions made.**—"All things that pertain unto life and godliness."

It is important to see that the religious life is never given to any one in a matured condition. Sometimes truth is so imperfectly stated that we get the impression that the new man is created in us fully grown, as Adam was made a full-grown man. Conversion is supposed to be enough, and the converted man is fully saved. Nothing could be more unscriptural. The new man is born in us a babe; all we need assure ourselves of is independent breath and a cry. Abundant provisions are made for its nourishment and growth; and they all range round Jesus Christ, and the spiritual and experimental knowledge of Him. The terms "life" and "godliness," if they were not intended to mean, may at least suggest to us, the two spheres, the inner life of feeling, and the outer life of conduct and relations. The "glory and virtue" is misconceived as something to which we are called. The idea of the verse is, that our Lord's own glory and virtue, the inspiring example of His own beautiful and gracious life, are a perpetual call to us to culture soul-piety and practical goodness.

V. **The promises given.**—This must be restricted to such promises as bear upon our effort to live the godly life. Not the general promises scattered through the sacred Word, but the specific promises which are associated with calls to Christian duty and culture. Such as were spoken by Christ; such as are found in the epistles. It may be shown that they are (1) abundant; (2) sufficient; (3) adapted; and (4) assured.

VI. **The life shared.**—"Through these ye may become partakers of the Divine nature." The idea seems to be this: the culture of the soul is a culture into ever fuller communion with Christ, involving ever fuller communications of Christ's life and grace. And as the life flows more freely, there is more complete deliverance from the fleshly life, and consequently more and more freedom from the temptations and corruptions of the world. Or, to express it in another way, the full life of *love* to God in Christ insures full mastery over the life of *lust*.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 1. *Message to Gentile Christians.*—"Like precious faith with us." Not that all had an equal amount of faith, which would scarcely be possible; nor that their faith gave all an equal right to salvation, which the Greek could scarcely mean; but that all believed the same precious mysteries (compare 1 Pet. i. 7). It is delicately implied that "we as well as you have had it allotted to us; it is no credit to us; we are not superior to you." "Us" may mean either the apostles or (more probably) the first Christians, as distinct from those converted later, *i.e.* Jewish as distinct from Gentile Christians. This shows that Gentile converts are chiefly addressed in this epistle as Jewish were in the first epistle. Gentiles would be more likely to be doubters respecting Christ's return to judgment than Jews, who were well acquainted with Hebrew prophecies on the subject. Gentiles also would be more likely than Jews to fall into the excesses denounced in the second chapter, which bear a strong resemblance to the catalogue of heathen vices given by St. Paul in Rom. 1. The idea that Christians are the antitype of the chosen people is prominent in St. Peter's writings (compare ch. ii. 11; 1 Pet. i. 10). Note that no particular Churches are mentioned. The second epistle is more "general" or "catholic" in its address than the first. Here again we have a mark of independence. A writer personating St. Peter, and referring to the former letter, would probably have taken care to make the address of the second letter tally exactly with that of the first.—*A. Plummer, M.A.*

Precious Faith.—God's righteousness here is His *fairness*. He has no respect of persons, and hence has

given to all Christians, early or late, Jew or Gentile, a "like precious faith." 1. *The nature and origin of precious faith.* (1) It originates with God. (2) It comes through man's ministration. (3) It is the effect, act, and evidence, of a renewed state of mind. 2. *A few of the properties of such a faith.* (1) It is essential to the existence of the Christian character. (2) It is used to denote the whole household of God. (3) It appears in Christian ordinances. 3. *A caution as to its appropriation.* 4. *Its necessity and importance.*—*J. Stevens.*

What is Faith?—Faith is a grace wrought in the soul of a sinner by the Holy Spirit, whereby, being emptied of all opinionative thoughts of his own righteousness, strength, and fulness, he is enabled to look to Christ, to betake Himself to Him as his only Saviour, to receive Him, to rest and rely upon Him for the remission of his sins, for a righteousness to justify him in the sight of God; for strength to enable him to perform duty, to follow after holiness, and to encounter spiritual enemies; and for eternal life when his work of faith and labour of love is ended, and when he comes to finish, with joy, his course. This is the Scripture notion of saving faith; and it has God for its fundamental and principal object, as He is a God of truth, reconciled to sinners; but it has Christ for its immediate object, for it is only by His mediation that a sinner can come to God.—*A. Taylor.*

Ver. 4. *Divine Assimilation.*—"Partakers of the Divine nature." The text suggests—1. That the Divine nature is the source and standard of all perfection. (1) God is an eternal, infinite, and self-existent Being. (2) He is both remote from and independent of His works. (3) He is absolutely perfect. (4) He is an emotional and communicative Being. 2. That man can partake of that nature. We become partakers of it when we (1) receive Divine ideas; (2) are made holy; (3) have eternal life; (4) are made happy in God. 3. That the process of becoming a partaker of the Divine is most Divine. (1) The substratum—the mental and moral natures of man. (2) The Divine medium—the Atonement. (3) The causation—the Spirit. (4) The Divine instrumentality—the promises. 4. That such a participation sublimates man. It augments (1) The Divinity; (2) the sublimity; (3) the spiritual development of life.—*C. Briggs.*

Promises.—Here, not the promises of the Old Testament, that Christ should come, or even promises in general, but precisely the promises of the New Testament, that Christ should *come again.* "The certainty of Christ's return to reward the righteous and punish the wicked is one of the main subjects of the epistle." Promises are distinct from prophecies. These only declare what shall be, but promises declare that what shall be, shall be in special adaptation to us, and shall be provision for the supply of our highest and best needs. However promises in relation to the one special matter of Christ's coming again may have been in St. Peter's mind, we may be permitted to see the general truth, that God has always dealt with His people by drawing them on to the future, and giving them present assurances on which they may rest their faith, and feel inspired for present activity. It may even be said of all Christians, as it can be said of Abraham: they have nothing but promises; they live upon promises. Nothing is ever realised here that can in any sense be said to exhaust the promises. Indeed, their partial fulfilments never satisfy; they do but reveal to us the inexhaustible fulness of the promises.

I. **Then what do these promises rest upon?**—How is it that we can be so confident about them, and can willingly keep them for our cheering, though they are unfulfilled? The answer is not merely this: We have them in the Word. It is this: They reveal to us

Him in whom we trust. They reveal Him in His relations, Him in His thoughts and purposes. And in our best moods we rise superior to the shapings of the promise, and rest ourselves in the Faithful Promiser. To have God who promises is far better than to have God's promises.

II. **What of the present do the promises cover?**—The most remarkable direct personal revelation that ever comes to a Christian is perhaps the discovery that no need ever arises in his life that has not been thought of by God, and met with a promise in precise adaptation. Let but a Christian get into any night of affliction, and at once the whole heaven seems alive with stars of promise, concerning *his* things.

III. **What of the future do the promises assure?**—We easily forget *things* pledged for our future when it is borne in upon our hearts that God pledges Himself by the promises to be *our God* for ever and ever. Here or yonder the soul's only rest is in God Himself, the Faithful Promiser.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 5—11.

Vers. 5-9. *The Proper Response to Christian Privilege.*—The apostle has been reminding his readers of the Christian promises and privileges. Such reminders are always the basis on which is laid some earnest call to duty. In ver. 5, the apostle says, "beside this"; or better, "on this very account." R.V. "Yea, and for this very cause." Because of the promises and privileges, you should give diligent attention to making a worthy response in spiritual growth. Growth in Christian life is the prominent point of the teaching of this epistle. Perhaps St. Peter felt that his Christian life had witnessed a very remarkable growth, and that in this he was an ensample to the believers. He seems to sum up what he would most anxiously impress in the closing words of this epistle: "But *grow* in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ." The R.V. helps to the proper understanding of this passage. It is not "*Add* to your faith virtue," but "With your faith supply virtue." Do not be content with any one Christian grace, and do not exaggerate the importance of any one, but try to nourish harmoniously the complete, all-round Christian life and character. It is as if St. Peter had said, "You will surely find that each grace gained helps you to gain the other graces; and that every new grace, or improved grace, improves, and helps to perfection the other graces." The proper response for us to make to promise, and privilege, and indeed to our own pledge, is precisely this all-round and harmonious growth in Christian graces. What things are necessary, then, to the proper making up of the Christian character, and the Christian life? 1. *Faith* is pre-supposed; both as the *belief* which is the beginning of right relations with Christ, and as the daily faith or *trust*, which is very breath of the Christian life. A Christian only lives so long as he keeps his trust. 2. *Virtue.* Not purity, or chastity, which is a later association with the term. In Pagan ages *virtue* meant valour, courage; and this, filled with the Christian spirit, is the firmness, conscious strength, and good cheer, that come of firm, established Christian principle. It is really moral stability which brings a sense of sufficiency for every good work. This virtue led St. Paul to say, "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me." 3. *Knowledge.* Apostles never exaggerate, as we are apt to do, the importance of mere *head*-knowledge. But it is quite as true that they urge with much earnestness the intelligent apprehension of revealed truth. The more practical form of knowledge is, however, most prominent in their minds; it is the "wisdom" of the Book of Proverbs, which means "moral discernment," cultured skill in the actual ordering and ruling of our lives. Knowing how to behave ourselves in the house of God, and everywhere else.

Not mere *head*-knowledge, but what may properly be called *life*-knowledge, the basis of good self-ruling. 4. *Temperance.* Not mere abstention from anything, drink or lust; but wise management of self, so that there never shall be any excess. The power to strike the "happy mean" always. The skill that keeps from any form of excitement that tends to put us off our balance, and make us lose our self-control. Abstinence may be the best thing under given circumstances, but it is not the absolutely best thing. To use without abusing is altogether nobler than not to use at all. The saintly man is not the man who gets away from the world, but the man who, staying in the world, is not *of it*; never lets *it* master *him.* 5. *Patience.* Christian patience is *waiting*, but it is much more than waiting; it is endurance, which means a waiting that involves strain and trial. It is bearing a burden while you wait. It is that spirit which is only attained when life is apprehended as a sphere of moral discipline, the methods of which cannot now be fully understood, but the issues of which are absolutely assured, and the conduct of which is wholly in all-wise and all-loving hands. 6. *Godliness.* Better seen as God-likeness. Then it can at once be apprehended that, if it is to be something really practical, it must be likeness to "God manifest in the flesh." It must be the persistent endeavour to fashion our lives after the Christ-pattern, not by way of any mere servile imitation of incidents or actions, but in a noble way of giving sway and influence to the same principles, and motives. And to ensure "God-likeness" involves the deepest interest in the human life of the Lord Jesus, and such near fellowship with Him that we readily change into His image. 7. *Brotherliness.* "Love of the brethren." The power and the skill that may enable us to fix and arrange all our human relationships aright, and keep them right. There may be a direct reference to our relations with those who have like precious faith with us; our brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus. 8. *Charity.* R.V. "love." It may be doubted whether we can wisely lose the word "charity," which, for Bible readers, does not mean "alms-giving," but "considerate helpfulness of one another." And we want a word to express that, which is one of the essential features of the Christly life. Charity expresses the "beautiful" in Christian relations, as no other word can do. If the very close relations between these things be observed, it will be fully recognised that the getting of any one of them becomes a direct help to the gaining of the others. They are links of a chain, and if one link be drawn close, the others will surely be drawn nearer. The truth to present forcibly is, that Christian character is a *whole.* You see it is when you see it perfectly presented in Christ. We can never be satisfied with our own characters while the possible whole is unrealised. We can never be satisfied with one-sided and imperfect developments in those to whom we minister in Christ's name. We must desire their all-round and harmonious growth. And the grace is at our command for nourishing in ourselves, and in others, that all-round growth.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 10. *Making Sure our Calling.*—The doctrines of predestination, Divine grace, and effectual calling, have a strong basis in human conviction. Whatever his forms of belief may be, every saved man cherishes the assurance that he was *called* of God, and *led* to make choice of God. There are two factors in human redemption: the moving of Divine grace toward us, the response of our hearts to it; and both are essential. The order of the words "calling and election" is not our usual order. We say "election and calling" (Rom. viii. 29, 30). St. Peter may have meant by "election,"

here, man's act of choice. Then he may be representing Christian hope on both its sides: God's calling and man's choosing.

I. **Our calling and election needs to be made sure.**—Not to God. It does need to be realised by ourselves, and demonstrated to others. There is a great difference in individuals as regards Christian *assurance*. Some have no confidence throughout their lives. Assurance partly depends on natural disposition, partly on surrounding circumstances and influences. Religious experience is too *living* a thing to be squared to any system. The kind of relation that health bears to the work and pleasure of life, an assured interest in Christ bears to our Christian living and labouring. The assurance of our calling bears directly—1. *On the activity of Christian life.* "Not barren or idle," as ground bringing forth nothing. Illustration: Conviction of call on the old prophets made them active. Noah kept busy at his Ark under the power of strong convictions. St. Paul says, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel;" "Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ." In him was a noble restlessness of activity, based on strong conviction. 2. *On the fruitfulness of the Christian life.* "Nor unfruitful." "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." Fruitage of Christian knowledge. Real rooting in Christ is never afraid of growing in knowledge. There is sometimes more attention given to *rooting* than to *fruiting*; then the religious life is apt to weaken into mere sentiment. 3. *On the hopefulness of Christian life.* They that fail are "blind"—cannot see afar off. Plain human vision can see little beyond this present life. Strong confidence gets us upon the Delectable Mountains, and helps us to hold the telescope, and see visions of the far-away. Much of the joy of Christian living depends on the hopefulness which pierces into the future. 4. *On the responsibility of Christian life.* "Forgotten that he was purged." If a man is purged, it is manifestly as a preparation for a clean, new life. "Ye are washed, ye are sanctified." Life gains its full responsibility as the sphere in which Christ can be glorified, when we can say, "I am a purged, washed, redeemed man." 5. *On the security of the Christian life.* "Shall never fall." Illustrate from experience of Christian ministers. God's call is just what keeps them from despair in the strain-times of life. There are similar experiences in private life. 6. *On the final triumph of Christian life.* "So an entrance ministered abundantly." A most unworthy feeling sometimes gets possession of Christian professors. They think they may get at last just inside the gate; satisfied with being "almost saved," "saved so as by fire," "scarcely saved." Holy Scripture never encourages such feelings, because they usually represent a false humility. It urges us rather to aim at getting right close up to the throne. The Christian ought to go into heaven as a ship enters harbour after voyage, with yards manned, and flags hanging along every rope. If it be so important that we should *have* and *keep* a well-grounded hope, the question remains—

II. **How can the assurance of our calling and election be maintained?**—"Give diligence." It is a matter requiring active pursuit. We must not idly wait for some Divine impressions. God's witness comes to workers. Yet we may pursue it wrongly. We shall (1) if we fall back on past experience; or (2) if we merely nourish religious feelings. The true direction is given by St. Peter (vers. 5-7). These terms describe growth—the growth which is the sure sign of life. Plant: its life is shown by its growing. Child: its health and vigour are evidenced by its growing. 1. True assurance comes out of growth in *godly character*. One grace is to be added to another. A lower grace is to rise and be developed into a higher. 2. True assurance comes out of growth in practical godly living. Ever more complete subjection of all life to the

sway of holy principle. Ever holding more and more of life under godly control. Up to the light you have, follow on, and you will find that, as you grow, assurance grows; you will "keep your calling and election sure."

Vers. 10, 11. *Christian Diligence.*—How eagerly we catch the last words of dying friends! In the fourteenth verse of this chapter St. Peter says, "Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me." The warm-hearted apostle, who through good and evil report had faithfully preached the gospel for many years, and had led very many souls to peace and joy, was about to enter within that veil which hides the "great majority" from mortal sight, and to join the "spirits of just men made perfect" in their eternal rest. With such a change at hand, it is no wonder that such an earnest and loving entreaty runs through this epistle. With the last moments of his life he strove to minister to the saints by stirring them up with the holy reminiscences of the past. What a worthy termination to the life of one who had left all things to follow the Master! Let the thought that our text formed a part of the last message St. Peter delivered to the Church, influence us to give the more earnest heed to his words. The expansion of the Christian virtues forms a part of the exhortation. We have a chain of eight links to forge. "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity." Out of the Christian temper these holy virtues grow, but their cultivation requires diligence. Our text is a resumption of the passage under another figure—that of entering service, and perseverance in duty. This duty is stimulated by the twofold promise of present safety and future glory.

I. The duty which is enjoined.—"Give diligence to make your calling and election sure." Negligence would have endangered the safety of their position. They were in possession, and they were exhorted to conserve every blessing and maintain a good profession. The subject has two branches, indicating two important steps in the experience of the saints. 1. *Your calling.* This word is frequently used by St. Paul. "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Eph. iv. 1). It is by invitation we enter the service of Jesus Christ. "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." The source of the invitation is Divine,—"For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." Two things are implied: the gracious invitation of the gospel, and the willing acceptance of it by us. Let us seize on these important points, that we may fully realise our *calling.* The gospel is a call from God. We have turned every one to his own way, and have forsaken the way of peace. Notwithstanding our apostasy, the gracious Lord has stretched forth His hands to a stiff-necked and a gainsaying people. The first step in redemption is from the throne: the rebels are asked to return and sue for peace. Under the old Dispensation the proclamation ran: "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else." Under the Christian dispensation the proclamation was renewed and intensified: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The mission of Jesus was not only to declare the merciful nature of God, but also to use every legitimate means to induce the sinner to seek God's favour. The Advent brought in a life more replete than any other, which embodied all the elements of influence and attraction. The Ambassador of peace sought, by a full exposition of the

terms of mercy, to influence sinners to accept their salvation. The parable of precept; by example and deed, yea, and by suffering and death, our blessed Lord put forth the invitation. His first great work was to *seek* the lost, to bring the offer of redemption home to the heart and conscience of man. The gospel is that representation, and its ministers are the ambassadors who cry, "Hear His voice, and harden not your hearts as in the day of provocation." The sum and substance of their mission is contained in the memorable words of St. Paul: "Be ye reconciled to God." But this is not all; we are called into the service of God, which is a course of life in harmony with the call. To accept the invitation is to make the life of Christ our example. We are called to repentance, to faith, to prayer, to holiness, and to service. The first response of the penitent is: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Those who accept the invitation engage to enter the service of Christ, and give Him their time, talent, and substance. This is our *calling*. 2. *Your election.* The term "election" in the writings of St. Paul generally means the pre-determination of God to save mankind through Jesus Christ. But St. Peter, in the text, uses the word in the sense of "acceptance." It is simply an extension of the meaning which the word "*calling*" contains. The servant is chosen, or approved of, after a trial of his services. This is a step forward. The first step is taken in answer to the sovereign will of God, through His mercy by Jesus Christ; but the second step is a movement in our own soul. The new birth is exhibited by the life which follows it. The new heart circulates the vital element through the whole man. 3. *Such a station demands diligence.* We do not at once ascend to the higher grade of faith, but must work out our salvation through fear and trembling. The climax of Christian experience is reached by a persistent effort of holy living. Diligence in the study of God's Word will bring the assurance of truth. Diligence in following the example of Christ will give a conscience void of offence. Diligence in the spiritual exercise of communion with God will give the evidence of the Spirit, testifying with our spirits that we are the children of God. Diligence in loving efforts to establish the kingdom of Christ in this world will bring the assurance of service. Every step forward brings us nearer the promised land. The higher objects of the Divine life are attainable, not by spasmodic effort, but by faithfulness to trust. The cross comes before the crown, and labour before rest. The example of Jesus will lead us onward and upward, until we reach the highest point in holiness and consecration. Let us lay aside every hindrance to run with patience the race set before us. The certainty that "if ye do these things ye shall never fall," stimulates action, for all the steps of faith are firm, and all the aspirations of hope are sure. There never will be any unfaithfulness in the Master; He will not discharge His faithful servants. If we are true to our Father's faith till death, we shall maintain the course, and get the crown. Those who have put their hand to the plough must not look back. It is by looking forward we make the straight furrow. Those who are in the fold will share its blessings world without end. They will never fall into unbelief or temptation, but will stand, firmly fixed on the Rock of Ages.

II. **The prospect which cheers.**—In looking upward there is to be seen the object for which all labour, and its possession. 1. *Everlasting kingdom.* "Wherefore we receive a kingdom that cannot be moved." The ultimate triumph of truth, and the universal reign of righteousness, are looming in the distance. The vision is full of encouragement. From one mind the law will go forth to rule all men; and from one heart love will flow to bless mankind. The kingdoms of this world change, but Messiah's rule will run parallel with the ages. "Thy

kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth for ever." Founded upon His immutable nature, and directed by His own inexorable counsel, His reign cannot be shaken by time or destroyed by sin. The gates of hell will not prevail against it. We are looking forward towards universal order, when the foundation of the government shall be laid in the affections of its subjects. Its organisation will be complete, and its boundaries commensurate with the habitable parts of the earth. To our labour of love and work of faith, this is the goal. Once established, the gospel will continue its hold on all believers, and supply them with unabatable joy. There will be no more sin, and no more curse. The kingdom will be lighted up by the presence of Jehovah, and no unclean thing will enter it. This, then, is that consummation for which the ages are in travail, and to which Christian effort will give birth. 2. *Abundant entrance.* The vision is that of the gate of the golden city, thrown widely open. It seems as if he saw the victorious army returning from the battle-field, receiving an ovation from the citizens. The result of Christian service is contemplated, and the joy that shall follow. The consummation of hope, and the realisation of the objects of faith, will flow into the soul abundantly. Abundant will be the gratification at seeing the victories of the cross. Jesus will be crowned "Lord of all." Abundant will be the welcome to the pilgrims of the night: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant"; and unstinted will be the congratulation when they enter the joy of their Lord. They will evermore reign with Christ in life. Such will be the end of prayer, such the reward of patience. Each worker will receive his penny, and each martyr his crown. The termination of the struggle will be the beginning of real and eternal life. Work, then, until the Master come with His reward to each faithful servant. Work, before the night cometh; work diligently to obtain the Master's approval now, and His joy hereafter.—*Weekly Pulpit.*

Vers. 11, 14, 15. *What Faith Makes of Death.*

I. **The representation of death as a putting off the tabernacle.**—There is, of course, a reference to the warning which the apostle received from his Lord "signifying what death He should die." He had learned that in his old age he should be seized and bound and led "whither he would not." In all probability the language of our verse would be more accurately represented if we read for "shortly" *suddenly*—the apostle's anticipation not being so much that his dissolution was impending as that his death, when it came, would be sudden—that is to say, violent—and therefore he seeks to warn and prepare his brethren beforehand. The expression seems to blend the two figures, that of a tabernacle—or tent—and that of a vesture. As the apostle Paul, in like manner, blends the same two ideas when he talks of being "clothed upon with our house which is from heaven," and unclothed from "our earthly house of this tabernacle." To such small dimensions has Christian faith dwindled down the ugly thing, death. It has come to be nothing more than a change of vesture, a change of dwelling. Now, what lies in that metaphor? Three things I touch upon for a moment. First of all the rigid limitation of the region within which death has any power at all. It affects a man's vesture, his dwelling-place, something that belongs to him, something that wraps him, but nothing that is himself. This enemy may seem to come in and capture the whole fortress, but it is only the outworks that are thrown down; the citadel stands. The organ is one thing, the player on it is another; and whatever befalls *that* has nothing to do with what touches him. Instead of an all-mastering conqueror, then, as sense tells us that death is, and as a great deal of modern science is telling us that death

is, it is only a power that touches the fringe and circumference, the wrappage and investiture of my being, and has nothing to do with that being itself. The "foolish senses" may declare that death is lord, because they "see no motion in the dead." But in spite of sense and anatomist's scalpels, organisation is not life. Mind and conscience, will and love, are something more than functions of the brain; and no scalpel can ever cut into *self*. I live, and may live, and—blessed be God!—I can say *shall* live, apart altogether from this bodily organisation. Whatever befalls, it is only like changing a dress, or removing into another house. The man is untouched. Another thing implied in this figure—and, indeed, in all three metaphors of our text—is that life runs on unbroken and the same through and after death. If the apostle be right in his conviction that the change only affects the circumference, then of course that follows naturally. Unbroken and the same! The gulf looks deep and black to us on this side, but, depend upon it, it looks a mere chink which a step can cross, when seen from the other. Like some of the rivers that disappear in a subteranean tunnel, and then emerge into the light again, the life that sinks out of sight in the dark valley of the shadow of death will come up into a brighter sunshine beyond the mountains, and it will be running in the same direction that it followed when it was lost to mortal eye. For just as the dying Stephen knew his Master again, when he saw Him standing in the glory, we should know our dear ones after they had passed through this change; for all the sweetness and all the love would be there still, and nothing would be gone but the weakness that encompassed them, and the imperfection that sometimes masked their true beauty. The same in direction, the same in essence, uninterrupted through the midst of the darkness, the life goes on. A man is the same, whatever dress he wears. Though we know that much will be changed, and that new powers may come, and old wants and weaknesses fall away with new environment, still the essential self will be unchanged, and the life will run on without a break, and with scarcely a deflection. There is no magic in the art of death which changes the set of a character, or the tendencies and desires of a nature. As you die so you live, and you live in your death and after your death the same man and woman that you were when the blow fell.

II. Death is further spoken of as a departure. "I will endeavour," says the apostle, "that yē may be able after my decease." The word for "decease" here is a very unusual one, as, no doubt, many of you know. It is employed with reference to death only twice in the New Testament, once in the text, and once in the account of our Lord's Transfiguration, where Moses and Elias are represented as speaking with Him "of the decease that He should accomplish at Jerusalem." You may observe that immediately after the last of my texts, the apostle begins to speak about that Transfiguration, and makes definite reference to what he had heard there; so that it is at all events possible that he selects the unusual word with some reference to, or some remembrance of, its use upon that occasion in the narrative of one of the evangelists. Again, it is the word which has been transferred into English as Exodus, and may possibly be here employed with some allusion to the departure of the children of Israel from the land of bondage. Now, looking at these three points, the literal meaning of this word, its employment in reference to the deliverance from Egypt, and its employment in reference to the death of Christ, we gather from them valuable considerations. This aspect of death shows it to us as seen from this side. Like the former, it minimises its importance by making it merely a change of place—another stage in a journey. We have had many changes already; only this is the last stage, the

last day's march, and it takes us *home*. But yet the sad thoughts of separation and withdrawal are here. These show us the saddest aspect of death, which no reflection and no consolation of religion will ever make less sad. Death, the separator, is, and must always be, an unwelcome messenger. He comes and lays his bony hand upon us, and unties the closest embraces, and draws us away from all the habitudes and associations of our lives, and bans us into a lonely land. But even in this aspect there is alleviation, if we will think about this departure in connection with the two uses of the word which I have mentioned. A change of place; yes! an Exodus from bondage; as true a deliverance from captivity as that old Exodus was. Life has its chains and limitations, which are largely due to the bodily life hemming in and shackling the spirit. It is a prison-house, though it be full of God's goodness. We cannot but feel that, even in health, and much more in sickness, the bondage of flesh and sense, of habits rooted in the body, and of wants which it feels, weighs heavily upon us. By one swift stroke of Death's hammer, the fetters are struck off. Death is a Liberator, in the profoundest sense; the Moses that leads the bondsmen into a desert it may be, but to liberty and towards their own land, to their rest. It is the angel who comes in the night to God's prisoned servant, striking the fetters from his limbs, and leading him through the iron gate into the city. And so we do not need to shiver and fear for ourselves or to mourn for our dear ones, if they have passed out of the bondage of "corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God." Death is a departure which is an emancipation. Again, it is a departure which is conformed to Christ's "decease," and is guided and companioned by Him. Ah! There you touch the deepest source of all comfort and all strength:

"Christ leads us through no darker rooms
Than He went through before."

And the memory of His presence is comfort and light. What would it be, for instance, to a man stumbling in the polar regions, amidst eternal ice and trackless wastes, to come across the footprints of a man? What would it be if He found out that they were the footprints of His own brother? And you and I have a Brother's steps to tread in when we take that last weary journey from which flesh and sense shrink and fail.

III. The last aspect of these metaphors is that one contained in the words of our first text: "an entrance ministered abundantly." The going out is a going in; the journey has two ends, only the two ends are so very near each other that the same act is described by the two terms. Looked at from this side, it is a going out; looked at from the other side, it is a coming in. The smallest faith that unites a man's heart with Jesus Christ makes him capable of receiving so much of salvation as is contained in the bare entrance into the kingdom; but every degree of faith's increase, and every degree of faith's enrichment, makes him more capable of receiving more of God in Christ, and he will get all he can hold. So every deed here on earth of Christian conduct, and every grace here on earth of Christian character, has its issue and its representative in a new influx of the glory, and a more intimate possession of the bliss, and a more abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom. —*Selected.*

MAIN HOMILETICS ON THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 12—15.

Completing a Life-Work.—St. Peter could not fail to realise how important to the young Christian Churches was his own personal influence, and his authoritative teaching, as well as those of St. Paul. It is singular that he makes no reference to his friend St. John, and we can only conclude that at this time

St. John had not found the opportunity for setting forth in writing his womanly, mystical conceptions of the person and gospel of Christ. It was befitting that St. Peter should make provision for the continuance of his life-influence, and that he should comfort his disciples with the assurance that he would have this in mind. In a sense the necessity was specially laid on St. Peter, as the most prominent of the apostles. But it is a duty which should be duly considered by every good man, and especially by every good teacher. No man has any right to allow his influence to be a merely temporary and passing thing. He ought to do all that in him lies to make it permanent. The relation of the apostolic developments of the Christian truth to the original revelations of those truths in the Person, teaching, and work of the Lord Jesus, needs very careful consideration. More especially in view of the fact that on the revelation rests the absolute Divine stamp, but on the developments only a Divine assistance, which worked through the particular knowledge, and peculiar characteristics, of individual minds; so that we have respectively the Petrine, Pauline, and Johannine settings of the truth. And St. Peter is in no way to blame if, in his anxiety for the preservation of Christ's truth, there blended an anxiety to preserve also the Petrine stamp upon it. It would have been an unworthy thing if St. Peter had cherished the idea of founding a Petrine school or sect; but a man may be jealous about conserving the particular settings of truth which have been revealed to him, and have come to him with power.

I. **Christian truth, and thought, and life, may become too dependent on individuals.**—The controversies of the Christian ages would have been milder-toned if the various settings of truth could have been dissociated from their authors, and considered simply upon their merits. Personal feeling comes in when we think of Cerinthus, and Arius, and Augustine, and Calvin, and Wesley, and there is a kind of jealousy for the system, out of respect to the man. Sectarianism, in nine cases out of ten, has grown out of the personal influence of some man. That is a perfectly legitimate force—one which God abundantly uses for the spread of His truth. But the response to it often becomes exaggerated and excessive, and men accept on the authority of the man rather than on the evidence of the truth. Following particular men is one of the grave weaknesses of our time. When a Christian life is really no more than personal attachment to an individual, and repeating after him, it is placed in the gravest peril when that man's influence is removed. So often the man has come to stand in front of the Christ.

II. **Because of this undue dependence, Christian teachers are often removed by death or otherwise.**—We can easily see that the prolonged influence of individuals must grow perilous. When pastors continue into old age in the same church, there are certain serious evils which become rife. If Calvin or Wesley, or any other leader, had lived on, how surely they must have been mischief-makers to the Church! And so often in smaller spheres, popular men carry people away, wisely and well, or otherwise, but always at the peril of quiet, sober Christian thinking and Christian living. And God's providence is always actively at work for their removal at fitting times. It is for the world's good that apostles die. Their work can only be for a while. It is for the Church's good that her thought-leaders and her popular leaders never stay very long in any one sphere. Sectarianism may be useful, but exaggerated sectarianism would not fail to secure the Church's moral ruin.

III. **The truth of all true teachers abides when they have passed away.**—No living seeds of truth sown in the souls of men ever really fail. It may very well be that we fail to recognise the fruitage. It often is a fruitage in life, in character, in triumph over sin, in good cheer, in comfort, in the soul's renewed power. We err in thinking so much of the results of Christian teaching and

influence in the purely intellectual spheres. And yet, what every man has truly taught surely goes to make up the whole of truth for the ages. Time does, indeed, try all settings of truth, and relegate some that seemed for a time very prominent, to the background and obscurity. And it is singular to notice how the spheres of Christian truth that interest men are constantly changing, and so what seemed to be lost settings of truth come into view and power again, and when they come are often unrecognised, and so they are freely talked of as the fresh discoveries of the new age. Every true teacher may honourably show an anxiety that the truth given to him to teach should be preserved; and this is best done by committing it to writing, as St. Peter did. Out of the writings the personal element soon fails, and the opinions and views come to stand on their own merits alone. Beginning with the holy gospels, what a splendid heritage of Christian literature has come to us! But this is not so fully recognised as it should be—the literature of each age belongs to each age, is adapted to each age, and fades with its age; but the literature of the next age is really its resurrection—its thoughts and truths re-translated, re-dressed, and re-expressed, to fit the moods of the new generation. The apostles and their immediate successors live on in every age. They have gone. Age after age their successors, too, have gone; but their teachings, a thousand times translated and adapted, are the Church's possessions to-day. And what is true of them is true of every man to whom is given grace to put a personal stamp on any side or aspect of the revealed truth of God. Dead—he lives.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 12. *The Present Truth.*—This is a suggestive phrase. There is a present truth for every age—that which God emphasises by His providence, which history emphasises by human need, and which doctrine emphasises by the extremes of error. In this day the present truth which is of supreme importance is the *supernatural.* The drift is towards naturalism in philosophy and materialism in practice. We must lay stress on the Divine and supernatural element in the Word of God, the nature of man, the history of the race, and the work of the Spirit.

I. **As to the Word of God.**—We must assert its inspiration and infallibility. Inspiration must be more than genius, or illumination which depends on internal consciousness, while inspiration has external attestation of prophecy and miracle. Any theory of inspiration that leaves out infallibility, destroys the value of the Bible as God's book, for it takes away the court of final appeal. Reason and conscience are ordinarily safe guides, but when they err we need an infallible standard by which to correct their variations, as the best watch needs to be adjusted by God's celestial clock.

II. **As to the Divine image in man.**—It is defaced, but not effaced, like a shattered mirror whose fragments still reflect your image. Development is at bottom a denial of the descent of man from God, and substitutes his ascent from the oyster. To make a man a mere animal leaves gaps unfulfilled—the beginnings of life, consciousness, intelligence, conscience. Moreover, it leads to the *caste* spirit, to the undervaluation of man as man, and the erection of barriers to human progress, and begets carelessness of his condition. It classes dogs and Hottentots together, and led the French governor of the isle of Bourbon to rank the Malagasy with asses.

III. **As to the hand of God in history.**—To make history atheistic is to make humanity anarchistic. If human history is but an accident or a fate, then, as there is no God in it to rectify it, man's only hope is to *right his own wrongs.* To believe in a Providence behind human affairs leads to patience and long-suffering; but if

there be no adjusting power, why consent to injustice? The alarming developments of Society to-day, which threaten all government with ruin, are direct results of infidel teaching.

IV. **As to the Spirit of God.**—Reformation is not regeneration. Transformations of character and communities which are radical and permanent are the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Nothing less than creative power can be equal to a new creation; and for the highest success in any true work for God and man, the Spirit of God is a necessity. Genius, learning, and philanthropy, come to their limits. The moral and spiritual nature of man refuse to yield until some mightier force is at work than man can bring to bear.—*Homiletic Magazine.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 16—21.

The Apostolic Testimony.—In the salutation of this epistle Simon Peter distinctly calls himself an "apostle" of Jesus Christ; and here he puts himself with the other apostles, and testifies of the veritablenesss of the witness which they made on the basis of their own knowledge and experience.

I. **It was clear and emphatic**—This is implied in the assertion that it was not vague, uncertain, and untrustworthy, like the "cunningly devised fables" with which the popular ear was tickled. "By this term probably some elements in the doctrine of the false teachers are alluded to; something analogous to the 'feigned words' of chap. ii. 3. There is reason for believing that the particular elements in their teaching thus incidentally condemned were of Jewish origin. If this conjecture be correct, then St. Peter is here dealing with errors similar to those condemned by St. Paul (1 Tim. i. 4; 2 Tim. iv. 4; Tit. i. 14—the only other passage in which the word 'fables' occurs). And in this case much light is thrown on some of the marked peculiarities of this epistle and that of St. Jude— viz., the fondness of both writers for the oldest, and sometimes the most obscure, passages of Old Testament history, as well as for some strange portions of uncanonical apocryphal tradition. They were fighting these seducers with their own weapons; difficult passages of Scripture and tradition, which these men had worked up into a system of pernicious mysticism, St. Peter and St. Jude proved to be altogether of a different meaning, and to tell against the very doctrines that they were employed to support" (*A. Plummer, M.A.*). The most effective way in which to show the clearness of the apostolic testimony is to contrast the gospels with the foolish and demoralising stories of the so-called apocryphal gospels.

II. **It was based on strong conviction.**—They themselves absolutely believed what they recorded or declared, and showed their conviction by giving up all, and enduring all, for the sake of their testimony. They were consequently more than officials who do a duty, and more even than prophets, who were mediums for conveying a message. They were convinced men, who put their own hearts into their testimony. And it is absolutely essential to all effective Christian ministry, that the speaker should have the "accent of conviction."

III. **The conviction was based on personal experience.**—St. Peter suggests much that was common to himself and the other apostles who were in the daily fellowship of Jesus Christ; but he refers precisely to the one experience which he was privileged to share exclusively with James and John. The Transfiguration may be treated as St. Peter's special personal experience and testimony, since he was the sole spokesman of the occasion. The precise interest of the Transfiguration lies in its being the most sublime revelation of the innermost mystery of Christ's person and mission,—one great point of suggestion there being the necessity and spiritual mystery of the Redeemer's sacrificial death. St. Peter did not repeat something heard; nor even something conveyed to his mind in

dream, or trance ; nor even something studied from a book. He claims accurate knowledge through personal experience, and in gaining that experience the full activity of all his human powers and faculties. Compare the declaration of St. John : " That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life " (1 John i. 1).

IV. **The experience absolutely assured the righteousness of Christ's personal claim.**—They were " eye-witnesses of His majesty." This may be illustrated by the results of the wine-making at the marriage in Cana of Galilee. " This beginning of His signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory : and His disciples believed on Him." We need to see more clearly that all the experiences of Christ's fellowship which the apostles had brought impressions of *Him* ; not just of His power, or His wisdom, or His goodness, but of *Him*, in whom so evidently dwelt " all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

The Witness of Prophecy to Christ.—The explanation of this reference to prophecy needs first to be given, and *Plummer's* note is suggestive of every important point. " *We have, as something more sure, the prophetic word*, as a second proof of the truth of my teaching respecting Christ's coming. The expression 'the prophetic word' occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. 'The Scripture' given as quoted by Clement of Rome, is quoted again in the so called Second Epistle of Clement (ch. xi.) as 'the prophetic word.' The quotation in both cases is probably from some uncanonical book of prophecies. Here the expression means the whole body of prophecy respecting the subject in hand ; but the meaning of the whole sentence is not quite clear. It may mean —1. That the Transfiguration has made prophecies more sure, for we who were there have thus witnessed their fulfilment. In this case, however, we should have expected something more than 'and' to introduce the statement, such as 'and hence,' 'and thus,' 'whereby,' etc. Or it may mean—2. That in the prophetic word we have something more sure than the voice from heaven. Here a simple 'and' is natural enough ; and the *word* of prophecy is suitably compared with the *voice* from heaven. But how can the word of prophets be more sure than the voice of God? In itself it cannot be so ; but it may be so regarded (1) in reference to those who did not hear, but only heard of, the voice from heaven. (2) In reference to the subject in hand. (*a*) For the readers of this epistle, the many utterances of a long line of prophets, expounded by a school of teachers only second to the prophets themselves, might easily be 'more sure' evidence than the narrative of a single writer ; and 'if they heard not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded' by the report of a voice from heaven. (*b*) The Transfiguration, though an earnest of Christ's future glory, was not so clear a promise of it as the express words of prophecy. If this latter interpretation be right, we have another form of authenticity. A forger would be likely to magnify his own advantage in hearing the voice from heaven over the ordinary proofs offered to every one. In any case, the coincidence with 1 Pet. i. 10-12 must not be overlooked." Dealing generally with the assertion made concerning the trustworthiness of the characteristic Old-Testament writings, consider—

I. **Prophetic Scripture.**—St. Peter clearly has in mind writings of an anticipative character, which foretold events that would occur in the future. The term is sometimes made to include the historic and didactic features of Scripture, but here reference must be to writings which have relation to the coming Messiah. And it must always be borne in mind that Jews found references to Messiah in very many mere side-allusions, which our logical Western minds compel us to free from any such relation. Indeed, the severer criticism of our

day tends to put serious limitation upon the long-recognised number of Messianic passages.

II. **Its source.**—Distinctly, the impulse and guidance of the spirit of God. The spirit, as the inspiration of prophecy concerning Messiah, should be carefully distinguished from the Holy Ghost as the witness and seal, dwelling in Christian believers. There are dreams of poets, visions of a golden age; but these may not be compared with the prophetic portions of Scripture, which are distinctly revelational, and designed to confirm faith in the Divine ordering of human affairs, with a view to redemptive issues.

III. **Its limitations.**—It is buried in current human history, or in figures understood only in particular ages, and must therefore always be dealt with in a large, general, and suggestive, rather than precise way.

IV. **Its precise mission.**—It had an immediate mission. It was to cheer hearts and keep up hope. It was a lamp in the night which must stay and brighten the house until the daylight streamed in at the windows. Its interest to us lies in what it *was*, and what it *did*, rather than in what it *is*. What kept the world's faith alive is always important.

V. **Its interpretation.**—It must not be conducted on any private lines, but according to principles of interpretation laid down. The idiosyncracies of individuals have wrought sad havoc in the treatment of God's Word.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Vers. 19-21. *Lock and Key.*—St. Peter had been speaking of the proofs which he and his brother apostles had received of our Saviour's power and greatness. After a reference to the Transfiguration, he comes to the proof from prophecy. He says, a prophecy is like a light shining in a dark place, until the day-dawn. As men burn a candle during the night to give light, so was God pleased to set up the lamp of prophecy in the world, to save mankind from being left in total darkness during the ages before the coming of Christ. The prophecies were designed to preserve a sense of God's goodness, and a recollection of His promises, to keep hope alive in the world, and to awaken men to the expectation of some great mercy, which God was preparing for His people and would bring to light in due time. When Christ came, the prophecies acquired a new use; they became, perhaps, the strongest of the outward proofs, the most striking of the external testimonies to the truth of our Saviour's mission. Their testimony is so sure, because not of private interpretation; that is, the prophecies did not refer merely to the events of the time and place when they were spoken; but pointed far onward into futurity, and had a grander reference and application to the Son of God. The prophet himself did not always fully understand his prophecies. He spake as he was moved by the spirit of God; he gave utterance to the threats and promises which God put into his mouth. But how those threats and promises were to be fulfilled, neither he nor his hearers knew. So that the prophecies were like a door with a curious lock or secret spring to it. Till the secret of the spring is found out, till the right key is given, we may puzzle ourselves as long as we please, but we shall never open the door. If you saw half a dozen doors with as many locks to them, so new and strange that not a smith in the country could make a key to fit any one of them, and if a man then came with a key which fitted all these different locks, and opened all the six doors, could you doubt that his was the right key? This is just the kind of proof which the prophecies afford of the truth and Divinity of Jesus. The weight of this proof rests on two simple facts: one is, that the prophecies were written many hundreds of years before

the birth of Christ. The other is, that Jesus died the death related in the New Testament. Compare, then, such writings as Ps. xxii. and Isa. liii., with the account of our Saviour's trial and crucifixion in the gospels, and any unprejudiced man must admit that the early writers were taught of God. Illustrations may be fully taken from the chapter in Isaiah. Four assertions are made in it: 1. Messiah was to be made answerable for a sum that was required. 2. He was to be taken off by an oppressive or unjust sentence. 3. He was to be dumb and patient before his judges. 4. He was to be brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and to be cut off for the sins of God's people. These are extraordinary assertions, yet they are all fulfilled in Jesus; so accurately, and in so many points, that the agreement cannot be accidental. Therefore, in Jesus we have the true key for the prophetic lock; and Isaiah, who foretold all these things so many hundred years before, must assuredly have spoken, as St. Peter says, not of his own will, but as he was moved by the Holy Ghost.—*A. W. Hare, A.M.*

Ver. 19. *Prophecies Fulfilled in Christ.*

I. **The prophets themselves in reference to Christ.**—1. Every one of them had in his day a good name and character at stake. 2. Still they were not afraid, nor slow, to venture their names upon mysterious oracles. 3. This is the more remarkable since they did not themselves fully understand what they prophesied. 4. The reason for this is, that they were rendered confident by God.

II. **Christ Himself in reference to the prophets and their prophecies.**—1. His birth. 2. His betrayal. 3. His condemnation and crucifixion. 4. His miracles. 5. His various sufferings. 6. His ministry—its nature and success. —*R. Philip.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Ver. 3. *Our Life-Picture.*—"At an artist's reception one day," says H. W. Beecher, "I saw a picture of a mountain sunrise, and I wondered at its marvellous depths, richness, and splendour of shade and colour, till the artist told me how he had toned down the picture and softened its colouring in its subdued harmony of tint; and I thought how often our life was growing to be like that picture of a mountain sunrise. God's unseen hand is before the easel, sketching here and shading there. The life-picture looks to us unfinished, fragmentary and imperfect now, but each new joy-light, each sorrow-shade is toning it down with all its gloom and glory into harmony with God's great ideal. He will frame it at last in such a setting of events as he chooses, and we shall find in the great gallery above that the light has been in the right place, and the shadows too."

Ver. 7. *Brotherly Kindness.*—Two fishermen, a few years ago, were mending their nets on board their vessel on one of the lakes in the interior of Argyleshire, at a considerable distance from the shore, when a sudden squall upset their boat. One of them could not swim, and the only oar which floated was caught by him that could swim. His sinking companion cried, "Ah, my poor wife and children, they must starve now!" "Save yourself; I will risk my life for their sakes!" said the other, thrusting the oar beneath the arms of the drowning man. He committed himself instantly to the deep, in danger of perishing for the safety of his companion. That moment the boat struck the bottom, and started the other oar by their side and thus both were enabled to keep afloat till they were picked up.

Ver. 10. *Who are the Elect?*—You have heard of the senator relating to his son the account of the book containing the names of illustrious members of the Commonwealth. The son desired to see the outside. It was glorious to look upon. "Oh, let me open it," said the son. "Nay," said the father, "it's known only to the council." Then said the son, "Tell me if my name is there." "And that," said the father, "is a secret known only to the council, and it cannot be divulged." Then he desired to know for what achievements the names were inscribed in that book. So the father told him; and related to him the achievements and noble deeds by which they had eternised their names. "Such," said he, "are written, and none but such are written, in the book." "And will my name be there?" said the son. "I cannot tell thee," said the father; "if thy deeds are like theirs, thou shalt be written in the book; if not, thou shalt not

be written." And then the son consulted with himself, and he found that his whole deeds were playing, and singing, and drinking, and amusing himself; and he found that this was not noble, nor temperate, nor valiant. And as he could not read, as yet, his name, he determined to "make his calling and election sure." And thus, "by patient continuance in well-doing, the end is crowned with glory, honour, immortality, and eternal life."—*Rev. E. P. Hood.*

Ver. 10. *Preparing for Eternity.*—I have read somewhere—I think it was of Bonaventura—that in one of his sermons he described himself as in a dream, beholding a vast valley of rocks covered with workers, or those who were supposed to be working. Some wrought, and as they wrought, they shaped pieces of stone. Every piece of stone was shaped to exactly the same proportions, squared to exactly the same shape. "And I saw," said the dreamer, "and behold while they wrought, invisible, white-winged angels stood by, and they took each piece of stone and bare it, and built of them a palace in the fair kingdoms among the mansions of light. And I noticed others who were idle, lying, sleeping in the valley of rocks; but I noticed that invisible, dark living spirits were by them while they slept—not to receive the hewn stones, but themselves excavating, and shaping, and bearing them away to build homes in the dark vaults of lost being. Then I knew that these stones were hours. And I knew that our hours are building our future eternal homes; that as they are passed here, so shall we be for ever.—*Hood.*

Ver. 11. *The Abundant Entrance.*—We may take an illustration from a vessel returning after a long voyage, and being received and welcomed by expectant friends. She has been, let us suppose, absent for years—has been toiling and trafficking in every sea—touching at the ports and trading in the markets of many lands; she is approaching at last her "desired haven" the harbour from which she set out, whence loving thoughts went with her as she started on her perilous way, and where anxious hearts are now wishing and waiting for her return. She is descried in the distance: the news spreads; all is excitement; multitudes assemble; pier and quay, beach and bank, are crowded with spectators, as the little craft pushes on, and every moment nears her destination. There she is!—worn and weather-beaten, it is true, covered with the indications of sore travel and long service, and with many signs of her having encountered the battle and the breeze. But all is safe! Her goodly freight is secure and uninjured; her profits have been large; the merchandise she brings is both rare and rich. She is coming along over a sunny sea, leaping and dancing as if she were alive. Her crew are on the deck, and, with straining eyes and palpitating hearts, are looking towards the shore. A soft wind swells the sails; the blue heavens are bending over the bark, as if smiling on her course, while the very waves seem to run before her, turning themselves about with conscious joy, clapping their hands, and murmuring a welcome! How she bounds forwards! She is over the bar! She is gliding now in smooth water, is passing into port, and is preparing to moor and to drop her anchor for the last time! While she does so there comes a shout from the assembled spectators—the crowds that witness and welcome her approach—loud as thunder, musical as the sea! Gladness and greeting are on every hand. Eloquent voices fill the air. The vessel has received "*an abundant entrance*;" her crew have been met with sympathetic congratulations, are surrounded by eager and glad friends, hailed with enthusiasm, embraced with rapture, and accompanied to their home with shouting and songs!—*Rev. T. Binney.*

Entrance Ministered.—The phrase "an entrance *shall be ministered*" is an expressive and a striking one; what can be the meaning of it? The English word supplying no satisfactory answer to this question, we naturally turn to the word employed in the original, and by this we are unequivocally directed to a usage which was anciently prevalent on the Greek stage. Without pretending to any extensive knowledge of theatrical amusements as they are conducted among ourselves, it may, I suppose, be safely observed that the scenery and the performers tell the whole story of the plot, and that an acted drama has not now any auxiliary explanation. It was not so in ancient Greece. There, besides the scenery and the actors, was placed at the side of the stage a small body of persons who took no part in the play, but at various points of its progress recited, or sang, a few sentences auxiliary to it; either announcing persons of distinction, explaining some intended action, or bewailing some tragical occurrence. This group of persons was called the chorus, and upon this word chorus is distinctly formed the verb which is here employed by the apostle when he says "an entrance shall be *ministered*" into the heavenly kingdom. One critical observation only requires to be made. At different periods of Grecian history the word to which I am referring appears to have had different significations. More anciently, and primarily, the word ἐπιχορηγέω signified to lead, or conduct, the chorus, while less ancient writers employ it to denote one who provided the expenses of the chorus. I hold myself quite at liberty to take the more

ancient, and the undoubtedly primary meaning of the word, as the only one which is at all suitable to the apostle's purpose. And his meaning cannot, I think, be less than this: that as in a dramatic performance persons of distinction were honourably introduced by the chorus, so the entrance of a saint into heaven shall be "ministered," or chorused. It shall not be the mere addition of one to the number of its inhabitants, not an obscure or unnoticed admission, as merely granted, but an entrance announced with gladness and accompanied with honour. To proceed yet a step farther, the apostle tells us that to some "an entrance shall be *ministered abundantly*." Keeping in view the general idea before us, the conception suggested by this very expressive word, "abundantly," it is not difficult to realise. State pageants vary in their degrees of splendour. Always befitting the royal dignity, on some occasions as when the personage introduced is of extraordinary rank, they are more especially gorgeous, every contrivance of courtly ingenuity being put into requisition to make the ceremony correspond with the dignity of the one party, and to express the regard of the other. In such a case an introduction may be said—to take up the phraseology of the text—to be "ministered abundantly." And the idea conveyed to us cannot be less than this, that among believers in Jesus there are some whose entrance into heaven shall be more especially honourable—whatever those honours may be, of which all that can be said is that the eye hath not seen them, the ear hath not heard them, neither hath the heart of man conceived them.—*Rev. John Howard Hinton, M.A.*

Ver. 19. *Promises of The Word.*—Like the aurora borealis shining on the frosty and sombre sky, tinging it with beautiful colours, and relieving it with brilliant rays, the promises of the gospel shine in tints of light and smiles of love over the cold and gloomy night of trouble.—*T. J. Wright.*

CHAPTER II.

MISCHIEF-MAKERS AND MISCHIEF-MAKING.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

THE subject treated in this chapter is the mischievous influence of corrupting doctrine. And false doctrine is constantly treated in the New Treatment in view of the immoral associations which always attended it, as with the idolatries of older days. True doctrine works for righteousness; false doctrine works for licence. True prophets had been referred to in chap. i. 21, and they suggest warnings against false prophets, and false teachers.

Ver. 1. **There were.**—In the times of the true prophets there were false ones. It is always so. The good and the evil go together. **False teachers.**—Such as the Judaising teachers, who dogged the steps of St. Paul, or such as the Gnostic teachers—or teachers of what subsequently became known as Gnosticism, who roused the intense opposition of St. John. Apart from these there may have been pure time-servers, who were ready to deceive the people if they could secure their own gains, such as Simon the sorcerer. **People.**—Term specially used of the Jews, as the people of God's choice (Matt. i. 21; John xi. 50). **Privily.**—With the idea of subtlety; craftily, not merely secretly. The warning was needed because of the guilefulness of the false teachers; their plausibility. (For examples of false prophets, see 1 Kings xxii. 6, 11, 24; Jer. xxviii.; Isa. ix. 15, etc.). **Damnable heresies.**—R.V. "destructive." "Sects" is better than "heresies." The word "heresy" means "choice of a party," and was used in later Greek for a philosophic sect, or school. St. Peter deals with classes rather than with persons. **The Lord.**—Here δεσπότην, Master. **Bought them.**—Compare 1 Pet. i. 18. Some of the early false teachers denied our Lord's humanity, and some His Divinity; but probably St. Peter had chiefly in mind entangling men in old legal Jewish forms, when they had been lifted into spiritual liberty and privilege.

Ver. 2. **Pernicious ways.**—Lascivious doings (see Mark vii. 22; Rom. xiii. 13; 1 Pet. iv. 3; Jude vers. 4, 8). The connection between false doctrine and immorality is fully recognised, but the apostle may have in mind self-willedness, swayed by self-seeking motives. **Way of truth.**—The service of Christ was at first known as "the way" (see Acts ix. 2, etc.).

Ver. 3. **Through covetousness.**—The preposition, ἐν, indicates that covetousness (unprincipled getting for personal advantage) was the element, the substratum, of their profession. Illustrate Simon the sorcerer. **Feigned words.**—Made-up tales. Their own

manufactures, which rest on no authority. "A bombastic mysticism, promising to reveal secrets about the unseen world and the future, was a very lucrative profession in the last days of Paganism, and it passed over to Christianity as an element in various heresies." (Compare "Cunningly-devised fables," chap. i. 16.) **Damnation.**—Destruction. "Judgment does not loiter on its way; destruction does not nod drowsily. Both are eager, watchful, waiting for the appointed hour."

Ver. 4. **The angels.**—No article—"angels." Whether the antediluvian sinners or beings of another world, are meant, is disputed. There is no Old Testament record of, or allusion to, any fall of angels. *Plummer* thinks the reference is to statements in the book of *Enoch*, that certain angels sinned by having intercourse with women (see T. Moore's poem, "The Loves of the Angels"). "Angels" may be a translation of "Sons of God" (Gen. vi. 2). **To hell.**—Cast them into dungeons. *Tartarus*, ταρταρώσας, an unusual term.

Ver. 5. **Old world.**—In the book of *Enoch* the Flood follows close upon the sin of the angels. **Eighth person.**—Noah and seven others. **Preacher.**—κήρυκα, herald. One to whom a message is given to deliver. (Compare Jonah.)

Ver. 7. **Just Lot.**—With special reference to moral sentiments. **Filthy conversation.**—The lascivious life of the wicked.

Ver. 8. **Righteous man.**—Spiritual righteousness is not suggested; only moral righteousness. Lot's character must be judged from his story as a whole. **Vexed.**—Tortured. Why, then, did he stay in the district? "Righteous" is a comparative term; and we must think of Lot in relation to the defective morality of his age, and in view of the licentiousness of those with whom he is here contrasted.

Ver. 10. **Despise government.**—Dominion. Both self-restraint and restraint of good rules and wise authorities. Those who own no superior. **Evil of dignities.**—Lit. "They tremble not while railing at glories." "These men deny the existence of, or irreverently speak slightingly of, those spiritual agencies by means of which God conducts the government of the world."

Ver. 11. **Angels.**—See Jude, ver. 9. Allusion is evidently to some tradition which has not been otherwise preserved. (But see Zech. iii. 1, 2.)

Ver. 12. **Brute beasts.**—R.V., "as creatures without reason, born mere animals, to be taken and destroyed." Omit "natural." A denunciation of final ruin against these covetous and corrupting teachers.

Ver. 13. **Spots.**—In a moral sense. **Sporting themselves.**—Making great show and boasting, as if they were the favourites of heaven.

Ver. 14. **Beguiling.**—Enticing. Decoying as with a bait. **Covetous practices.**—Plans of fraud and extortion. **Cursed children.**—Children of the curse: or children of malediction. They are devoted to execration.

Ver. 15. **Bosor.**—R.V., "Beor." From which it is only a dialectical variation.

Ver. 16. **Rebuked.**—Lit. "But had a conviction of his own transgression"; was convicted of it. **Madness.**—Infatuation; conscious and voluntary perversion of mind.

Ver. 18. **Great swelling words of vanity.**—Exaggeration, unreality, boastfulness, emptiness, are expressed by this phrase. **Clean escaped.**—Better, "who are just escaped," "almost escaped." Such were in special peril of these evil things.

Ver. 19. **Servants.**—Bond-slaves. (See Rom. vi. 16, viii. 21.)

Ver. 20. **They have escaped.**—It is not clear whether the deluded ones, or those who delude them, is meant. Probably the latter. "The fullest clearness of spiritual vision had not protected these heresiarchs from the temptations of their sensuous natures."

Ver. 22. The form of the proverbs is participial. "The dog returned to his own vomit; the washed sow to her wallowing in the mire" (see Prov. xxvi. 11). "In both cases stress is laid on the fact that there had been a real change. The dog had ejected what was foul; the sow had washed herself; but the old nature had returned in both cases. Those who after their baptism returned to the impurities they had renounced, were, in the apostle's eyes, no better than the unclean beasts. In the union of the two types of baseness we may, perhaps, trace a reminiscence of our Lord's teaching in Matt. vii. 6" (*Plumptre*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—8.

The Essence of Heresy.—It has been satirically, but with much suggestive truthfulness, said that orthodoxy is "my opinion," and heterodoxy is "other people's opinion." It should be carefully observed that, in Scripture, heresy is never regarded as a mere difference in intellectual standpoint, mental apprehension, or word setting. It is always regarded from its moral side, always seen as bearing a mischievous influence upon the character, or giving an unhealthy licence to the conduct. Heresy is anything and everything that

helps a man to do wrong. By its fruits it is known. That opinion is wrong which works out into unrighteousness.

I. **Heresy is not the reverent endeavour to understand revealed truth.**—Revealed truth has to be understood and explained; it has to be understood, and set forth in fresh language-forms, *for each age.* And it is the gravest mistake to represent the new shapings of truth-forms in order to carry old truths to the minds of a new generation, as being heresy. The old forms become, in course of time, dead as mummies, and must be replaced by new forms, using the terms and connotations of each fresh generation.

II. **Heresy is not the individual stamp which persons put upon revealed truth.**—If it were, then every intelligent and independent-minded person would be a heretic; and progression in the apprehension of truth would be impossible. It is the genius given to individuals, that they can put life into old things by re-clothing them for presentation to our minds and hearts.

III. **Heresy is every setting and shaping of opinion that gives incitement or support to moral evil.**—Pharisaism is therefore heresy. Later Judaism was heresy. Heathenism was heresy. Gnosticism, on some of its sides, was heresy; because these things gave licence to moral evil. Still, everything that works for *righteousness* is orthodox, and everything that works for *evil* is heterodox.

IV. **Heresy is that setting of opinion which has for its inspiration the covetous spirit.**—The man is sure to go wrong in his thinking whose aim is getting for himself. See ver. 3.

Examples of Divine Judgment.—Three instances of Divine vengeance, proving that great wickedness never goes unpunished—the special point to illustrate being that the Divine judgments are sure to come upon those who associate Christianity with licence, or with self-seeking. The three instances are here given in chronological order—Wanton Angels; Flood; Sodom and Gomorrah: while those in Jude are not—Unbelievers in the Wilderness; Impure Angels; Sodom and Gomorrah.

I. **The example of the angels.**—We must carefully dissociate the representations of modern poetry from the teachings of Scripture. Milton's use of legendary matter carries no authority, and affords no explanation of difficult allusions in Holy Scripture. Moore's "Loves of the Angels," is a pure work of imagination. It was a common Jewish idea that the term "sons of God" in Gen. vi. 2 meant the angels. But there can be no reasonable doubt of the fact that both St. Peter and St. Jude took their idea of fallen angels either from the book of *Enoch* (an apocryphal work of that age), or from the current traditions which were afterwards embodied in the book. It is certain that Holy Scripture carries no revelation at all in relation to the matter. "Not improbably the false teachers made use of this book, and possibly of these passages, in their corrupt teaching. Hence St. Peter uses it as an *argumentum ad hominem* against them, and St. Jude, recognising the allusion, adopts it, and makes it more plain; or both writers, knowing the book of *Enoch* well, and calculating on their readers knowing it also, used it to illustrate their arguments and exhortations, just as St. Paul uses the Jewish belief of the rock following the Israelites." The sin of the angels was the self-willedness that found expression in self-indulgence. Instead of keeping their dignity as the servants of God, they asserted a dignity for themselves, in independence of Him. When that dignity of their own worked itself out, it showed itself as sensuality, and moral evil, upon which the judgments of God must come.

II. **The example of sinners before the Flood.**—It is singular to find St. Peter and St. Jude so deeply interested in the antediluvians, and we can only suppose

that speculations concerning them, and their fate, were characteristic of the times. But it has been noticed that in the book of *Enoch* reference to the Flood immediately follows on reference to the sin of the angels. Those old-world sinners set themselves, in their self-will, against God; and the self-will did what it always does, worked itself out into immorality and violence, upon which the judgments of God must rest. The inference in each case is that the false teachers, who were corrupting the Churches, were self-willed men, teaching self-willed opinions, and the fruitage of their teaching was precisely what you might have expected it to be, a licence to self-indulgence and sin.

III. **The example of the cities of the plain.**—Pride, nourished by the idle life which a luxurious soil permitted, manifested itself in a masterful self-willedness, which found expression in immoralities of the most abominable and degrading character. Upon them the judgments of God, taking a most terrible and overwhelming character, were bound to fall. "The judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah forms a fitting complement to that of the Flood, as an instance of God's vengeance, a judgment by fire being regarded as more awful than a judgment by flood, as is more distinctly shown in chap. iii. 6, 7, where the total destruction of the world by fire is contrasted with the transformation of it wrought by the Flood." The great sin of Pagan self-willedness was sensuality. The great horror of heathenism is sensuality. The great peril of the early Christian Church—under the influence of self-willed teachers—was sensuality. Christianity works ever towards the righteousness of moral self-restraint; and that is not Christianity which, in any sense or degree whatever, gives licence or incitement to moral evil. The judgments of God must come on all professing Christians who fail to "keep the vessels of their bodies in sanctification and honour."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 5. *A Preacher of Righteousness.*—That is, a preacher whose preaching, if followed, would surely work out into righteousness. There was in his day the necessity for a very extraordinary Divine judgment. The long-lived race proved to be so gigantic in its iniquities and abominations that its entire removal became necessary. But God never lets threatened judgments fall until He has given sufficient warning, and provided space and opportunity for repentance. Noah was to be the agent in giving the Divine warning to that sinful generation; and the opportunity for duly responding to the warnings was provided by the long delay of judgment. Noah was to warn by word. He is called "a preacher of righteousness." He was to warn by act—building on persistently, day by day, at the Ark, and testifying thus his belief in the Divine threatenings. For one hundred and twenty long years he was to keep up his witness, and carry on his work. And we can only admire the loyalty and the faith which kept him quietly going on amid the jeers and scoffs of the thoughtless multitudes who watched his work, and listened to his word. Here is no common man. For one hundred and twenty years he held on his faith in God against all kinds of temptations. It would have been a little thing if, on receiving his commission from God, he had gone away, dwelt in a cave, nourished his faith in secret, and then, at the close of the time, come forth to declare his warnings. Here is the surprising thing: the man stood in the world's eye all through those years. He lived among the people whom he warned. They might say of him and of his work what they pleased, but he went on gathering his material, shaping and fitting things together, letting his strange vessel grow in sight of all who cared to look. The hermit who lives for God in a secret cell is not so very

admirable; commendations may well be kept for the man who lives for God in the market-place and in the street. The religion that is worth anything can stand the strain of commonplace, every-day life and relations. The man who cannot be godly in home and business cannot be godly anywhere. It is in his common life among men that the moral strength of a Noah is revealed."—*From "Revelation by Character."*

The Reception of Noah's Preaching.—Now, Noah believed God's Word, that He was about to destroy the inhabited parts of the world with a flood, if they did not repent. We are told that he preached righteousness to his neighbours, and told the world around him to repent of their wickedness, or destruction would come upon them. We can imagine how they scoffed and jeered. "What strange story have you to tell us? that we shall be destroyed by a flood? We will believe it when we see it. You want us to be religious, and so you try to frighten us, in order to make us give up our sins. Tell us something pleasing; we hate this melancholy message you bring us. Religion has gone out of fashion here. They found it was not profitable, and so they gave it all up. Everything has gone on as it was since the beginning of the creation, and we shall not trouble ourselves because of this message." Noah preached; they laughed; it was all unheeded; no one returned from his evil way; no one believed the message which God sent by Noah to a guilty world. He turned from them with a heavy heart. But he felt also that, like a brave man, he had done his duty. He began to work at the Ark or great ship which God told him to build, and this showed his *own faith* in the message. The world around him, no doubt, thought him mad, but God comforted and supported him by making a covenant or solemn promise to him that he and all his family should be saved. . . . Death yawned about them, but Noah was supported by a faith in the truth, love, and faithfulness of a God who will save to the very uttermost all who come to Him for shelter, and who will bring those who trust in Him safely across the cold, stormy waters of death to the land where faith becomes reality.—*R. Barclay.*

Method in Miracles.—The spiritual substance of the revelation contained in the sacred Scriptures is presented to us as sanctioned and proved, both to sense and reason, by a long array of miracles. The present purpose is to point out certain characteristics of the alleged miracles of the Bible which deserve special consideration. 1. The whole series is entirely worthy of the hand of God. In this respect the *works* of the Bible correspond to the *words*. Amidst the large number recorded, there is not one which fails to support the character either of nobleness, or greatness, or beauty, or usefulness, or sublime beneficence, or awful power, which we must attribute to the Deity. None of them is of the nature of a *trick*, or bears with it any admixture of a grotesque or frivolous element. Compare the miracles of the Bible with the wonders of ecclesiastical history. 2. The apparent suitableness of the miracles to the times and seasons when they were alleged to be wrought, with differences which would scarcely have occurred to literary inventors. 3. All the alleged miracles of the Scriptures were wrought in support of the most exalted ideas, in defence of the highest interests of man, and in illustration of the loftiest moral attributes of God. 4. The miracles of the Scriptures are inextricably interwoven with the web of Jewish history, so that the history becomes unintelligible apart from the supposition of the miracles. 5. A system of prophecy runs parallel with a system of miraculous agency in the recorded dispensations of God. The one yields support and credibility to the other. 6. The chief objection to the reality of the Scripture miracles is derived from their cessation. It is said,

Why do they not occur now? But it was no part of the Divine plan to encourage the expectation of the violation of natural law, or the perpetual presentation of miraculous evidence to the senses. The moral evidence suffices after miracles have once attested the Divine origin of religion.—*Edward White.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 9—22.

Denunciations of the Libertines.

I. **Confidence in God's over-ruling.**—"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly." This involves His recognition of the ungodly, and visitation of them in judgment. The sway and triumph of evil in the world is most perplexing to God's people; it would be altogether overwhelming if they could not be sure of the Divine overruling with a patience that can wait for fitting opportunities. Delayed judgment is never any sign of indifference, nor is delayed deliverance. As Christ said to impatient disciples, so God again and again says to His people, "My time is not yet come, but your time is always ready." The overruling of God is even more important than His ruling. It meets us just where we feel our chief difficulty.

II. **Denunciation of vices.**—The things which naturally follow as the outcome of false teaching—(1) impurity, (2) self-assertion, (3) railing, (5) wanton and luxurious living, (5) covetousness. These denunciations can only with great difficulty be made subjects of pulpit exercise. They must be classed with the imprecatory Psalms. There may come times and fitting occasions for publicly denouncing the characteristic iniquities of a nation or a generation; but such work can only be done wisely by specially fitted men, and men who have gained the right to speak. In small spheres of pulpit service, the denunciation of public sins is apt to be taken as directed to certain individuals; and the personal element produces bitterness rather than conviction.

III. **The law that increases Divine judgments.**—Privilege enjoyed deepens responsibility. When privilege is abused; when men know and do not; when men who have come out of their sinful life go back to it;—then it is as though the stone on which they might have fallen fell on them. The weight of woe heaps up for those who were once "fair for the celestial city," but turned back to wilfulness and sin.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 9. *The Godly Delivered*—the unjust reserved unto judgment. There are only two great classes of people in the world—the *godly* and the *unjust.* The godly are those who have been born again, made partakers of the Divine nature, and live unto God. The unjust are those who are ungodly, who live to themselves and to the world. God deals very differently with the two classes.

I. **His treatment of the godly.**—1. He allows them to fall into temptations, as (1) solicitations to sin, and (2) as trials. This he permits (*a*) to manifest the reality of His grace, (*b*) to condemn the world, (*c*) that we may be conformed to Christ. 2. The Lord knows how to deliver them. It matters not what form the temptation may take.

II. **His treatment of the unjust.**—"God knoweth how to reserve the unjust to the day of judgment to be punished." 1. The end of all the ungodly is to be punished. 2. God knoweth how to *reserve*; He is not in haste to punish.—*R. M. McCheyne.*

God's Judgments.—In a general way it may be said that the Old Testament is the book of God's judgments, and the

New Testament the book of God's mercies. There are stories of judgment in the New Testament (Judas, Ananias, Elymas), and there are stories of God's mercies in the Old; but this distinction marks off the characteristic of each Dispensation. Few hearers get much good from the histories of God's judgments read to them from the Old Testament, because they are not felt to be matters of personal concern. 1. We ought to learn from them that God will not forget any godly man whatever, but will save him amid the destruction of all around him. 2. With the ungodly it will be otherwise; for them, so long as they continue in their ungodliness, there is neither mercy nor hope, but a certain looking forward to wrath and punishment at the hand of a mighty and offended God. There is no mercy for the obstinate and impenitent sinner. The two great lessons to be learnt from such histories are: the extent of God's most fearful judgments, and their certainty. For as the word of God's mercy is sure, so is the word of His wrath. And who are the cursed? All who are living in any known sin; all who are living in forgetfulness of God; all who are not Christ's people; all who are not showing forth the blessed fruits of the Spirit in their daily lives. Many trust they shall do well, if they keep from the grosser works of the flesh. Some may say, "This is the old story we have heard so often." But that should give double cause for trembling, seeing the gospel has been slighted so often and so long. God sends merciful invitations to repentance, that men may be saved from the ruin of a wicked world. It is He who will bring to pass the threatenings of His word against all manner of unrighteousness, and ungodliness, and sin.—*A. W. Hare, A.M.*

Ver. 15. *Perversion as Shown in the Character of Balaam.*—Repulsive as Balaam's character is, seen at a distance, when it is seen near it has much in it that is human, like ourselves, inviting compassion, even admiration; there are traits of firmness, conscientiousness, nobleness. And yet the inspired judgment of his character as a whole is one of unmeasured severity. Our main lesson in Balaam's history must ever be to trace how it is that men, who to the world appear respectable, conscientious, honourable, gifted, religious, may be in the sight of God accursed, and heirs of perdition. Balaam illustrates perversion.

I. **Perversion of great gifts.**—The inspiration of Balaam was from God. In him Divine powers were perverted—1. By turning them to purposes of self-aggrandisement. God's true prophets make no effort to show themselves different from others. Balaam does everything to fix attention on himself. His enchantments were a priest's manœuvres, not a prophet's. He was a self-seeker. Balak struck the key-note of his character when he said, "Am I not able to promote thee unto honour?" 2. By making those gifts subservient to his own greed. His very vaunts show that Balaam half suspected his failing. Brave men do not vaunt their courage, nor honourable men their honesty. By Balaam spiritual powers were degraded in order to make himself a vulgar man of wealth. (Compare the case of Simon Magus.)

II. **Perversion of conscience.**—Shown in his second appeal to God. He ought to have been satisfied with his first answer. In duty "first thoughts" are best; they are more fresh, more pure, have more of God in them. Balaam's problem was how to go to Balak, and yet not offend God. He went to God to get his duty altered, not in simplicity to know what it was. All this rests on the idea that the will of God *makes* right, instead of *being* right. The second stage is full of hideous contradictions. God permits him to go, and then is angry with him for going. We notice in him the evidences of a disordered mind and heart. In Balaam we see an attempt to change the will of God. His feeling was, God is mutable. What was wanting for Balaam to feel was, God *can-*

not change; what he did feel was only this: God *will not* change. See also his attempt to blind himself. We see perfect veracity with utter want of truth. He does not deceive Balak with a spell. He would not utter a falsehood, but tries to get away from seeing the truth. Balaam tried a last expedient, and recommended Balak to use the fascination of the daughters of Moab to entice Israel into idolatry; and a more diabolical wickedness could hardly be conceived. The root of Balaam's sin was selfishness. Balaam's self—the honour of Balaam as a true prophet; therefore he will not lie. The wealth of Balak for himself; therefore the Israelites must be sacrificed. Even in his sublimest aspirations he never forgets himself. 1. Learn the danger of great powers. It is an awful thing, this conscious power to see more, to feel more, to know more, than our fellows. 2. Mark well the difference between feeling and doing. A man may be going on finely, uttering orthodox words, and yet be rotten at heart.—*F. W. Robertson.*

Ver. 16. *Balaam and the Ass.*—An excellent old writer, speaking of Balaam, to whom St. Peter refers in the text, compares him to Redwald, the first Saxon king who professed Christianity, and who set up, in the same church, one altar for the Christian religion, and another for sacrificing to devils. Balaam, beyond, perhaps, any Scriptural personage, was the "double-minded man," signalised by the apostle James. Balaam was neither an impostor nor a hypocrite. He rather seems to have been a man heartily and honestly bent on the doing of what our Lord declares can never be done: the "serving of two masters." We must admit that God communicated directly with Balaam, not only giving him orders and prohibitions, but actually furnishing him with the words he was to utter over the Israelites. Perhaps full justice has not been done to Balaam. He had good impulses, which were only unserviceable and abortive because outweighed and countermatched by covetousness and the love of money. He had a conscience vigorously at work, under whose chastisement his sufferings must have been terrible. Balaam is the nominal Christian of these times, sincerely anxious to stand fair, and to keep terms with disciples of Christ and with men of Belial. When we see men devout in church, and something very different on week-days, we must not set them down as necessarily hypocrites. There is a *bona fide* struggle to compound with conscience, and run together in the life, man of God and man of the world, as warp and woof—very foolish, no doubt, and impracticable, but not base, not dishonest.

I. Recall to memory the few facts of this miracle.—Whether what happened to Balaam happened to him in vision, or in literal historical fact, the moral and spiritual lessons are exactly the same. There is something to be learned from that strange group on the highway, considered merely as a fact: a wicked man being obstructed in the pursuit of his wickedness by a prodigy. We learn how gracious God is in making the way of transgressors a hard one; just as when Pilate was warned by the dream of his wife, and Saul was warned on the road to Damascus. Regarding the narrative as an *allegory*, we may see that this is not the only place in the Bible where proud man is humbled and brought to confusion by being outdone and excelled by one of the beasts of the field. How came it that the eyes of the mere brute on which the prophet rode saw the vision of the angel before the prophet himself? There is here a portrait of what takes place in the world, day after day, in all generations. There is hardly a wider gulf between the animal and the man than there is between some unlettered believer in sacred truth and the philosophic doubter or denier of that truth. The difficulty of difficulties in the present state of things is not to exert

but to control the faculties of our reason, to persuade ourselves where reason cannot follow, that there reason ought not to *try* to follow. Faith is the problem of the militant Church. The province of the human mind is to humble itself, to keep the ear wide open, and to be contented that the eye shall remain closed through excess of light. Only when, by nature or through a struggle, the mind prefers listening to understanding, can the glory of Christ crucified be spiritually discerned.

II. **This miracle of the text is virtually repeated whenever pride or prescription takes to lording it over some lower rank, guilty of no sins but natural disadvantages.**—Illustrated in the history of British colonisation. For many years we considered black and brown and red men to be brutes, and treated them accordingly. Illustrated in our resistance of Providence. We make a miserable blunder whenever we try to force Divine providence, or to urge the events of our lives dead against the angel. If we want to go one way, and our destiny, controlled by guardian angels, is forcing us into another way, our wisdom will lie in succumbing at once. We shall take nothing by contesting it. Things like that living thing under Balaam will crush our foot against the wall, so that we cannot even dismount and walk. Providence will maim us for every pathway but its own.—*Henry Christopherson.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Ver. 4. *The "Hell" of St. Peter. Greek, "Tartarus."*—This is the only passage in the New Testament in which this word occurs. It is a purely heathen word, and embodies a purely heathen conception. As they pried into the future, the Greeks and Romans saw nothing clearly, although the "initiated," perhaps, had been quickened into an intense yearning for, if not a very bright and vivid hope of, a world to come. The world beyond the gates of death was, for them, "a world of shades." Their utmost hope, even for the good, was that some thin shadow of the former man would survive to enjoy some faint shadow of his former honour and pursuits. The utmost they foreboded for the wicked was that their thin, wavering, unsubstantial ghosts would be doomed to hopeless tasks, or consumed by pangs such as men suffer here. Sometimes they gave the name "Tartarus" to the whole of this land of shadows; but more commonly they divided the under-world into two provinces: Elysian fields, in which the spirits of their heroes and sages, with all who loved goodness, wandered to and fro, illumined by a pale reflection of their former joys; reserving the name "*Tartarus*" for that dismal region in which the ghosts of the wicked were tasked, and tantalised, and tormented. . . . But the Tartarus of St. Peter by no means answered to our hell, as it is usually conceived. Our plain duty is to read the above passage just as it reads in the original Greek: "God spared not angels who sinned, but cast them into Tartarus."—*Salvator Mundi*

Ver. 19. *Slavery of Sin.*—Men would rather be sin's drudges than God's freemen, and neglect that service wherein is perfect freedom for that wherein there is intolerable slavery. They will disturb their consciences, violate their reason, impair their health, in contradicting the laws of God, and prefer a sensual satisfaction, with toil here and eternal ruin hereafter, before the honour of God, the dignity of their nature, or happiness, or peace and health, which might be preserved with a cheaper expense than they are at to destroy them.—*Charnock.*

Ver. 22. *The Habits of the Sow.*—There is no regeneration for the sow in any amount of washing by water; the ablution over, away she wends again to her wallowing in the mire. Like the canine race (dishonourably characterised in the same proverb) the porcine is of ill account in Holy Writ. As the flesh of the swine is formally prohibited as "unclean" in Leviticus, so in Isaiah the offering of swine's blood is, by implication, denounced as almost inconceivably abominable, and the "eating swine's flesh, and the abomination and the mouse," are with execration connected together (Isa. lxvi. 3, 17). Of the Mohammedans we are assured that nothing in the creed or practice of Christians does so much to envenom the hatred of Mohammedans against them as the fact of their eating pork. Besides its being an offence to their religion, their aversion to the flesh of the "unclean beast" resembles an instinctive antipathy, such as the "idea of uncleanness," when

once it sinks into the feelings, seems always to excite in those whose personal habits are scrupulously cleanly.

The Backslider's Fate.—The Greek poet tells us of Hecuba not daring for shame so much as to lift up her eyes, or look Polymnestor in the face, because she had been a queen, but was then a poor captive. Common captives can easily lift up their eyes and cry to those who are in prosperity for relief and help, whereas others who have lived at ease can with more ease starve than beg. As a downfall from a seeming height in spirituals into the mire of sin hath more wickedness in it than a bare continuance in sin, so a downfall from a real height in temporals into the mire of misery hath more trouble in it than a bare continuance in misery. They who have made a fair show, or an outward flourish, in the faith, and afterwards fall back, are worse than those who never made any show at all. It is sad for any one to live openly in sin; but for such as have made an open profession of godliness to apostatise, and fall back to sin—this is matter of saddest lamentation.—*Caryl.*

CHAPTER III.

THE UNFULFILLED PROMISE OF THE COMING.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

THE apostle now deals with those who made the delay of the Lord's coming, and the disappointment consequently felt by many Christians, an occasion for mockery. The sense in which the Early Church expected an early personal return of the Saviour, and based their expectation on the words of our Lord, and the teachings of St. Paul and St. Peter, needs to be carefully considered. Probably both the apostles and the Christian people gave a materialistic setting to what was intended to be spiritually realised. It has recently been confidently argued that our Lord's supposed eschatological teachings should be limited to the destruction of the Jewish religious system in the Roman overthrow of Jerusalem, save when those teachings must have a spiritual application.

Ver. 1. **Second epistle.**—Assuming not only a first, but that first sent but a little while before. "This epistle, already a second one." **Pure.**—That is, separated, so unsullied, sincere (Phil. i. 10). "Its primary application is to that which will bear the full test of being examined by sunlight, and so it carries with it the idea of *transparent* sincerity.

Ver. 2. **Of the apostles.**—"Through *your* apostles."

Ver. 3. **Scoffers.**—"Scoffers shall come in their scoffing." **Own lusts.**—"The habit of self-indulgence is at all times the parent of the cynical and scoffing sneer." Scoffers revelling in scoffing, a cumulative expression to denote shameless scoffers.

Ver. 4 **Fathers.**—Here probably the first believers in Christ, who are represented as having proved the hope of Christ's coming to be an illusion, as they died before it was realised.

Ver. 5. **Willingly.**—Wilfully forget, because it does not suit their purpose to remember. Ignore. **Standing**, etc.—More precisely, "formed out of water, and by means of water"; implying possibility of the Flood. See the account of Creation in Gen. i., ii. *Plumptre* says, "The apostle speaks naturally from the standpoint of the physical science of his time and country, and we need not care to reconcile either his words, or those of Gen. i., with the conclusions of modern meteorological science."

Ver. 6. **Whereby.**—By the two outlets of water, Gen. vii. 11. **World.**—This term distinctly assumes the universality of the Deluge. **Perished.**—A term strictly applicable only to living creatures.

Ver. 7. **Reserved unto fire.**—This is part of the teaching of the book of *Enoch.* Scriptural allusions are thought to be found in Dan. vii. 9-11; 2 Thess. i. 8, "stored up for fire." "By analogy with ver. 5 we understand that the fire for which the present heavens and earth are reserved, exists now as a constituent in their original constitution, but prepared and designed as the agent of their dissolution. Science corroborates this."

Ver, 8. **One day,** etc.—The time-element gave opportunity to the scoffers. The time-measures of God must not be thought of as like those of men. It is to misrepresent this verse, to regard it as fixing God's measure for a day as being a thousand years. To do so would make God's judgment-day a thousand years long, and the day of Christ's coming also a thousand years long. The Millennium is a *day*, if the last sentence of this verse be taken literally.

Ver. 9. **Not slack.**—The apparent delay is arranged in Divine wisdom, and with due consideration of the saints. "God is long-suffering, because He is eternal" (*Augustine*). **To usward.**—"Toward you."

Ver. 10. **Great noise.**—Rushing noise. **Elements.**—Or "heavenly bodies." *Macknight* says, "The electrical matter, the sulphurous vapours, the clouds, and whatsoever floats in the air, with the air itself."

Ver. 11. **Shall be dissolved.**—Lit. "are being dissolved." **All holy conversation, and godliness.**—Both words are in the plural. All forms of holy living.

Ver. 12. **Hasting.**—(Omit "*unto*"). Hasting the coming by holy lives. **Wherein.**—Or "on account of which."

Ver. 13. **New heavens,** etc.—See Isa. lxv. 17, lxvi. 22; Rev. xxi. 1. The idea is fully expanded in the book of *Enoch*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—7.

Doubts Concerning Christ's Coming.—It is important to notice that the apostolic letters assume previous apostolic teachings. In the progress of the years the apostles found various intellectual and moral evils were seriously affecting the religious thought and life of the disciples. Their epistles are mainly designed to be corrections of these evils, and special effort is made to recover the neglected features of apostolic teaching which ought to have made such errors and evils impossible. So St. Peter here speaks of "stirring up their pure" (sincere and reverent) "minds by way of remembrance." A certain measure of authority was, from the first, felt to attach to apostolic utterances, because they were persons who had immediate and direct experiences, instructions, and revelations concerning the matters of which they spoke and wrote. We can fully recognise this reasonable authority without presenting in any exaggerated way their absolute freedom from error. It is manifested by the facts of history that they did not adequately apprehend the spiritual character of Christ's coming, or the period that must elapse before He would come in any sensible manifestation.

I. **Christ's coming as apostles taught it.**—Their standpoint is indicated by the question which they asked of their Lord just before His ascension: "Wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Christ, in reply, only told them that He could give no account of the precise time, but left them to understand that the kingdom *would be* restored; and they had an immediate and pressing duty to perform, and keep on performing, until the time for setting up the kingdom came. With this in their minds they put their own meanings into the message of the angels who appeared when their Lord had passed out of sight: "This Jesus, which was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld Him going into heaven." On this basis an apostolic doctrine of Christ's coming grew. At first they expected *Him* to appear when the cloven tongues appeared. Then they shifted their expectations to an immediate future, and, when they began to suffer persecutions, comforted themselves with the assurance that He was coming to vindicate them, and to judge their persecutors. Time passed on, and He did not come just as they anticipated; and some of their number died, unvindicated and unavenged, and deprived of whatever privileges were to attend the coming. But still they persisted that the "day of the Lord is at hand." It does not appear that the spiritual sense in which believers have always felt that Jesus has fulfilled His promise was ever apprehended by the apostles. They had the promise and the hope, but they could only realise it when placed before them in a carnal and earthly setting. And that setting put it in limitations which started criticism and encouraged unbelief.

II. **On what grounds could doubts of Christ's coming again be cherished?**—There do not appear to have been any special forms of doubt in those days. The objections urged are precisely those which have been heard in every Christian age, and are heard to-day. They may go under two heads, and be put in relation

to the two conditions of human thinking—time and space; but they always assume, what we are by no means prepared to admit, that the coming is altogether and only sensible, material, and earthly. It is said (1) He is always coming *now*, but the now never comes. It is said (2) If He came in a material form He must put Himself in space-limitations, and could not possibly be the help and blessing that He *is* as an unlocalised, everywhere present, spiritual Saviour.

III. **What facts of Divine dealing make all such doubts unreasonable?**—The scoffers put their scoffing in this form: "You have told us of a coming affliction such as there has not been from the beginning of the creation, and lo! we find the world still goes on as of old, and no great catastrophe happens." St. Peter's answer is that men spoke in just the same way concerning certain other great historical catastrophes and calamities. There is always human confusion when time-measures are applied to the Divine Being and His dealings with men. The threatened catastrophes always have come, and what men called "delay" had a Divine mission of warning and opportunity. Divine time-delay is never a basis on which doubts can reasonably rest. The only doubts in relation to the coming of the Lord permissible to Christians are those which lead them to question whether as yet they have quite sounded the fulness and depth of their Lord's meaning, when He promised to "come again." We ought to be advancing in spiritual power and insight, and so better able to read our Lord's spiritual meanings. And he who can enter fully into the blissful reality of our Lord's spiritual presence is relieved of all undue anxiety concerning a possible bodily manifestation. "That is not first which is spiritual; but that which is natural, and afterwards that which is spiritual." Judgment of mankind is spiritual work. The reward of the righteous is spiritual reward. Christ is king of souls, and, here or yonder, then or now, He is the spiritual Christ who comes in spiritual ways. Still, for so many the spiritual truth has yet to keep its material shapings and dress, and they can only realise His coming at all when they can picture to themselves a majestic, sensible manifestation, wrapped about with clouds.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 4. *Christ's Coming.*—Notice—

I. **How St. Peter answers five questions relating to the last day.**—1. Whether we are yet to wait confidently for the last day. 2. When, and at what time, it will come. 3. Why Jesus has not come for so long a time. 4. How, and in what manner, the last day will come. 5. What Christ will perform on that day.

II. **How thoroughly he instructs us as to the manner of our preparing for it.**—1. In holy conversation and godliness. 2. To wait patiently for, and hasten to it. 3. To give all diligence, that we may be found blameless by Christ.—*V. Herberger.*

Ver. 4. *Death as Sleep.*—In the use of the verb to "fall asleep" for dying we are reminded of our Lord's words, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth" (John xi. 11); of St. Paul's, "many sleep" (1 Cor. xi. 30). So in Greek sculpture Death and Sleep appear as twin genii, and in Greek and Roman epitaphs nothing is more common than the record that the deceased "sleeps" below. Too often there is the addition, as of those who are without hope, "sleeps an eternal sleep." In Christian language the idea of sleep is perpetuated in the term "cemetery" (κοιμητήριον = sleeping place), as applied to the burial-place of the dead, but it is blended with that of an "awakening out of sleep" at the last day, and even with the thought, at first seemingly incompatible with it, that the soul is quickened into higher energies of life on its entrance into the unseen world.—*Dean Plumptre.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8—13.

Long-suffering is not Indifference.

I. **The Divine time-measures.**—Ver. 8 contains the "second answer to the sceptical argument. Time is the condition of man's thought and action, but not of God's. His thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways as our ways; what seems delay to us is none to Him." The figurative expression of this text has been much misrepresented and misused. It is when it is treated as a precise statement, and made the basis of minute calculations. The whole conception of a Millennium rests on a figurative expression. When it is said that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day," it is simply meant to assert that God's prophecies and promises must never be tested by human time-measures. If He says a thing will happen *to-day* we must always keep in mind that it is *His* "to-day," not ours; and that His to-day may cover even what we should call a "thousand years." As an argument against the scoffer this is effective enough. The force of his scoff is broken when he is compelled to reckon the fulfilment of promises by *God's* time-measures.

II. **The patience of Divine delay.**—It needs to be clearly seen that, since God must always keep moral ends in view, He can never make an *unconditional* promise. The promise is a moral force. If that promise fulfils its end the promise can be made good at once. If that force is in any way hindered, the fulfilment must be left over until the moral force has duly affected its mission. And the Divine patience is seen in being willing even to be misunderstood and misrepresented, rather than to cease exerting the graciously redeeming moral force. There is no sublimer revelation of God than that which comes to us in the Divine delayings. He can *wait* and *bear*, in view of the ends of His infinite love for man. He is "not slack concerning His promise." We never may think that He is indifferent—that "He has forgotten to be gracious." That never can explain the Divine action. We may always find long-suffering patience. He is not willing that any should perish. He stretches opportunity of repentance to its utmost limit. He gives warning after warning, until the utter hopelessness of any further warning is made quite plain, and the cup of self-willedness and iniquity is quite full.

III. **The certain ending of times of Divine delay.**—"But the day of the Lord will come." If judgment be threatened as a flood, the flood will come, unless men repent. A hundred and twenty years may pass, and men may grow bold in their impious self-security; they may laugh away all fears as they enjoy their sunny days; but the flood will come. The Flood came. God's "word never returns to Him void." It will certainly be the same in regard to the promise of Christ's coming, whether that be viewed as the vindication of the saints, or as judgment on their persecutors. Divine delay in no sense indicates that the Divine purpose is abandoned. Let nobody for one moment think that. Christ will come. "The day of the Lord will come." And if the scoffer persists in scoffing, let him remember that the sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered Zoar; there was every prospect of another splendid summer day; but that day the fire of God fell. Certain as death is judgment—is Christ's coming to judgment.

IV. **The certainty of Divine judgment is present blessing.**—It is a constant and a gracious persuasion to virtue. This is its proper influence upon us. It makes us say, "What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness." By the earnestness of our endeavours in cultivating the godly life, and growing in grace, we should be "looking for, and hasting unto the

coming of the day of God." Not "looking for" in any sense of idly watching at a window; but looking for, as Christ taught us the good servant looks for the return of his Master, by all devoted obediences, all earnest activities, all careful preparations. Christ is coming; then let us "be diligent, that we may be found of Him in peace."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 8. *A Thousand Years as a Day.*—The latter half of this saying is quite original, and has no equivalent in Ps. xc. 4. The second half is only partially parallel to "a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday, when it is past." Consequently we cannot be sure that the apostle had this passage from the psalms in his mind, though it is probable enough that he had. That God can punish in one day the sins of a thousand years is a thought which is neither in the text nor in the context. What is insisted on is simply this: that distinctions of long and short time are nothing in the sight of God; delay is a purely human conception. *Justin Martyr* (about A.D. 145) gives "the day of the Lord is as a thousand years" as a quotation, and in this form it is closer to this verse than to Ps. xc. 4. As another possible reference to our epistle follows in the next chapter, it may be regarded as not improbable that Justin knew the epistle. But the saying may have been a favourite one, especially with those who held Millenarian views. In the epistle of *Barnabas* (xv. 4) we read, "For a day means with Him a thousand years, and He Himself witnesseth, saying, Behold, to-day shall be as a thousand years," where for "to-day" the *Codex Sinaiticus* reads the day of the Lord." Irenæus has, "The day of the Lord is as a thousand years" twice. Hippolytus has it once, Methodius once. In no case, however, is the context at all similar to the verses before us.—*A. Plummer, M.A.*

The Brevity of God's Delays.—No delay which occurs is long to God; as to a man of countless riches, a thousand guineas are as a single penny. God's œnologe (eternal-ages measurer) differs wholly from man's horologe (hour-glass). His gnomon (dial-pointer) shows all the hours at once in the greatest activity and in perfect repose. To Him the hours pass away, neither more slowly, nor more quickly, than befits His economy. There is nothing to make Him need either to hasten or delay the end.—*Fausset.*

Ver. 11. *What is a Holy Conversation?*—The Revised Version reads "holy *living*," but the word "conversation" may be taken as altogether more suggestive. It is a very searching thing to require a holy tone and character upon all the turning about, in and out, here and there, to and fro, with this man and that, in all the every-day and commonplace associations of life. And that is what is meant by the "holy conversation" of the text. It may seem at first sight as if "godliness" were very much the same thing as "holy conversation," but we may distinguish between the actual conduct of life and the inspiring motive of it. The inspiring motive should be "godliness." "Godliness" is the realisation of God's abiding presence, the fruits of which are reverence and trust. But the argument by which a "holy conversation" is urged upon us by the apostle is certainly somewhat peculiar. Because all present material things are to be dissolved; because the heavens shall pass away with a great noise; because the elements shall melt with fervent heat; because the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up;—therefore, we ought to be supremely concerned about our "holy conversation and godliness." If this stood alone it would be perplexing; but when St. Peter adds "Nevertheless

we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," we begin to understand him. A great testing time awaits God's people; what it was to be could only be conceived under the forms of an overwhelming commotion of material things. In that time of testing nothing could possibly stand but steadfast goodness, an established "holy conversation and godliness." Out of that time of testing will come a condition of confirmed holiness; there will be a "new heaven and a new earth," whose supreme characteristic should be that in it "dwelleth," "abideth," "righteousness." Only they who maintain the "holy conversation and godliness" can have any place in that "new earth"; but he who has persistently kept righteous during the testing time shall then be "righteous still." That, then, is our work as the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to earnestly maintain our "holy conversation and godliness," as our true preparation for every time of strain that may be coming, and as providing the only sure defence from the evil influences which that time may bring. And we are to maintain it because only those who are holding it fast can have any "entrance ministered unto them into the everlasting kingdom" of righteousness. It is very significant that the apostles, while anxious about right *opinion*, are so much more anxious about right *conduct* and right *character*. The two may go together, and always should, but conduct and character must come first, and be esteemed as of supreme importance. "Only let your conversation be such as becometh the gospel of Christ." We do well, then, to try and understand what a "holy conversation" is; or, to put the same thing in other words, what actual and practical ordering and shaping of our human life and relationships is involved in our making a Christian profession. "What manner of persons ought we to be?"

I. A holy conversation is a daily life ordered by principle.—One Scripture writer earnestly counsels us not to let our life *drift*. But it is precisely *that* we are tempted to do. To let things go. To live on, day by day, simply responsive to the accidents of the day, and fitting our wisdom and skill, as well as we can, to the duties and emergencies of the day. It is but a butterfly kind of life, flitting lazily from flower to flower, and sipping what nectar we can. A "holy conversation" was never attained in that way. It is easy enough to drift into a low, careless kind of life, but no man ever yet put a stamp of character upon his conduct until he gained a clear meaning and purpose for his life. It is the greatest work of education to inspire the boy with a great resolve. He is not educated unless he has come to see a meaning in his life, to set before himself a noble purpose, and to recognise the law or principle by which all his efforts to attain are to be ruled. To start in life without a fixed principle is like starting a voyage on the unknown and wind-driven seas, without a guiding and controlling helm. Sometimes the principle chosen for the ordering of a life is not a *good* principle, but even then it has its power as a principle, and in the sway of it the man reaches altogether grander things than the man possibly can who drifts through life, anyhow and anywhere, without any guiding principle at all. But there is no reason against our choosing such a principle as will secure for us a "holy conversation." We can resolve that life shall be ordered on the principle of always and simply *doing what we know to be the will of God*. For us that will is in part declared in the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in part witnessed every day afresh, in adaptation to the circumstances of life, by the indwelling Holy Spirit. And what we call "conversion" is precisely this: the dethroning of the old principle of seeking the interests of Self, and enthroning the principle of service to the holy will of God. Just in the measure in which a man's life is ordered and toned by that principle will his daily life and association be

described as a "holy conversation." That is the first thing, and there is nothing more absolutely essential to right living. We can attain nothing unless we are purposed to attain it. We can attain no high thing unless our purpose be based on a principle, and that principle be the noblest that can give character to a life. It is but putting this in figurative form for the apostle to say, "I beseech you, therefore, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice . . . which is your reasonable service."

II. **A "holy conversation" is a daily life shaped to a pattern.**—We want help in finding befitting expression for our principle in the actual details of our daily association and duty and influence. We see this want very clearly in the case of the Christians connected with the early Gentile Churches. It was most difficult and perplexing work to get the new Christian principle, altering, re-moulding, and re-toning all the common, every-day thoughts, feelings, and relations of life; and we know how, in all the epistles, practical counsels for guidance were given, and how, in the epistles to the Corinthians, the more special cases of perplexity were carefully dealt with. Was this principle, which we have commended as the right, the highest, the most sanctifying principle that can order a human life, ever so worked out into the details of any one human career that such a man's life-story can be taken as an absolutely satisfactory pattern? We can take any and every good man as an example of something; but then each ordinary good man is almost as much a warning as an example. Was there ever a case in which the pattern of the life-principle, worked into all details, was perfect? A case in which the life contains nothing whatever which we must be warned *not* to copy? That supremely important question has never yet received more than one answer. It never will receive more than one. That one is entirely satisfactory. The "Man, Christ Jesus" is the model life of details, in which the power of the controlling principle is seen; and whosoever takes that human life for his pattern increasingly finds himself satisfied with it, and inspired by it so as to attain a "holy conversation." But we shall misuse that pattern if we merely slavishly imitate it; if we inconsiderately say, Jesus did and said such and such things, and we must say and do exactly the same. That is childish imitation, not intelligently using our pattern. What we require is to see that Christ's pattern is simply but precisely this: the varying suggestion of ways in which the great life-principle finds befitting expression in the details of human conduct. What we have to ask, if we would follow the example of Christ aright, is this: How would Christ have expressed the great principle if He had been placed in just these particular circumstances in which I am placed? And we can get practical help from observing how Christ did act in circumstances that were similar. To "follow His steps" is to express principle as He did. Is it not quite plain that shaping life after the pattern which Christ has set will ensure a "holy conversation"? It did. No other terms are befitting as the description of the life of the Lord Jesus. Take what meanings you may please to attach to the term "holy," they are all satisfied in the blessed life of Him who "did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth"; "who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." And a "holy conversation" is possible to us in the measure in which we answer to the pattern, have the "mind that was in Christ Jesus," and are made "like unto Him in all things"—changed into His image.

III. **A "holy conversation" is a life sustained by consecrated energy.**—It is necessary to dwell upon this, because Christ's holy life may seem to us a far easier thing than we shall ever find a holy life to be; and we may readily get disheartened when we are impressed with the contrast between our

Lord's easy attainment and our ever difficult and doubtful struggle. It really should not be felt a surprising thing that we can but, at the best, come a long way behind Christ—a very long way indeed it will be unless we put consecrated energy into our endeavour. Such energy is demanded because the life-principle we have chosen is never so established and confirmed in us as to be beyond peril; and even more than that, it has a way of fading down in us and becoming ineffective if we do not perseveringly and persistently keep it well to the front, and make it have its say about everything. A true life-principle in a man must be everything or nothing, everywhere or nowhere. There is therefore constant demand for the consecrated energy which will keep power and vigour in the principle which makes a "holy conversation." The holy life is a life in earnest, and it can be nothing else. The hair and fur of animals reveals at once lowered vitality. Keep up the energy of the soul's life, and all the signs will be right; there will surely be the "holy conversation." And the consecrated energy is further needed because the practical outworking of our life-principle in the details of conduct is never easy *for us*, if it was always easy for Christ. Our Lord expressed a truth which was applicable to more than the *entrance* into the kingdom when He said, "Strive" (agonise) "to enter in." It is quite true that the effort for us will grow easier as years unfold, and will become easier in particular things, but it will never cease to make demands upon watchfulness, self-mastery, and consecrated energy. If we would attain the "holy conversation," we must be prepared to "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ," and we must be constantly lifting ourselves afresh up to the holy enduring. What is wanted, always wanted, is earnestness put into the endeavour to live the holy life. We must *mean* it, and strive for it.

IV. **A "holy conversation" is life toned by righteousness.**—There are so many things in life that would be beautiful if they were polished. Things never do become lovely until they get their bloom. What marvellous improvements have been made in the paper of our books and magazines! Now it has its polish on and shines. It may be of first importance that a Christian's conversation should be right—that it should be of sterling worth; the ring of it must be sound and true. But it does not answer to the description "*holy* conversation" until it gets its polish, until upon it lies the bloom. It must be beautiful and gracious. The fruits of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness," make up the bloom, and no man has gained the "holy conversation" until he is strong, true, and beautiful in Christ. Yes, in Christ. For there is a marvel about our Pattern. The Pattern proves to be a Person, a living Person, with whom we can have so real a fellowship that the glow of Him shall be reflected from us. Like Moses, when he saw God, the shine will be on our faces, the Christ-tone will be on all our intercourse. The Christ-bloom creeps all over us if we really come into soul-nearness to Him. Surely the question with which we started has been fully answered. What is a "holy conversation"? It is a human life ordered by the principle that ruled the human life of Christ. It is a human life in all its details shaped after the pattern of the "Man, Christ Jesus." It is a human life into which is put the energy of a vigorous life and a consecrated purpose. It is a human life that is kept within the radiance of Christ, and shines out His light upon men. Seeing that the great strain-time, taking one form or another, must come to us all; and seeing that through the strain-time we may hope to come to the world where all is righteous;—"what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?"

Ver. 13. *Heaven: its Nature and*

Character.—There is great confusion, both in the language and the opinions of men, in regard to the final dwelling-place which is promised in Scripture to the righteous. We speak of heaven continually, yet have but a vague and unconnected notion of what it positively is. There is no perspicuous and definite idea impressed upon the mind: we are wandering in the regions of generality, or probability. It *may* be this, or it *may* be that. It is a speculation rather than an article of faith. With our very limited faculty of intelligence, and with our many imperfections and impurities clinging on all sides around us, we shall never be able entirely to penetrate those sacred mysteries of futurity which God has but partially disclosed. To be wise *beyond* the Scriptures would be the height of impiety; but, nevertheless, there is no reason why we should not strive to be wise *up to* the Scriptures.

I. **Heaven is a place, a tangible, material locality.**—Heaven, as a word, is used with various significations. 1. The region of air or atmosphere immediately surrounding the earth. 2. The firmament, or vast expanse of space which is beyond or above the atmosphere, wherein the stars appear. 3. As the place of God's residence, and the dwelling of angels. Many persons have taken up the idea that heaven is nothing more than a sort of indefinite ethereal abode; that the grossness of materialism cannot enter there; that it is filled with nothing but certain mental and spiritual essences of glory and love, unallied to anything that savours of body or of matter; and so they attenuate and dwindle away all notion of it, till it disappears in nothing; and when pressed home, they find that their minds have been dwelling upon that which is purely imaginative, and has no foundation. The source of this is not difficult to detect. By our present connection with the world in which we dwell, our notion of materialism is inseparably connected with a notion of imperfection and sin; and by the exalted pictures which Scripture gives us of the joys of heaven, we are loth to admit, as within its comprehension, anything that appertains to our present state. The contemplative mind cannot think of heaven as constituted of any such material elements as here he sees around him. But there is a fallacy in such reasoning, and the fallacy is this: we look upon the material things of nature as they are *now*, and not as God made them originally; we look upon the human body as it is *now*, in sin, and not as the Almighty originally constituted it—in glory and holiness. Man was a sinless creature; there was naught for him but loveliness and beauty; there was no such thing as sorrow, no such thing as pain. The paradise in which Adam and Eve dwelt, we must consider to have been a perfect and blissful abode; and yet it was a *local* abode. It was not till Adam fell that materialism ceased to be holy. It was not till sin entered into the world that there was any drawback in the works of nature, as now looked upon by us. Then, indeed, the whole of the works of God were changed from their original destination. But who would say that, because *this* material state, in which we now are, cannot form such a place as heaven, that *no* material state shall? Then Scripture asserts the resurrection of the body, and the reunion of the body and soul, before entering the future abode of eternity. Christ, in His human nature, as a body, is in heaven, at God's right hand. We cannot conceive this at all, unless we conceive of God's right hand as a *place*. In all the descriptions of the blessedness of the righteous, that which describes their happiness infers that happiness as depending on organs of sensation, as seeing, conversing with, and listening to, other beings who shall there be associated with us. If there is material vision, material hearing, material recognition, there must be a material abode, and material objects on which they are to be exercised. The promised abode of righteous men, we may confidently say, is of a local

and material character. It is materialism, purged indeed from sin, and cleansed of all those imperfections which attach to it here—but still materialism.

II. **There is a certain character attached to the place** *without* which character no man can attain unto its glories.—"Wherein dwelleth righteousness." As some have theorised away the notion of heaven, by lifting it up beyond the cognisance of our senses altogether, so others, men of sensual and earthly affections, have so debased their notion of it as to represent it as a mere place of such corporeal pleasures as prevail in this world. But such an absurdity—let alone its profaneness—as that picture of Paradise which the Koran describes, can never for a moment be entertained by one who reads the Bible. The most perfect and hallowed goodness must of necessity belong to the saints in light. Harmony of views, identity of interests, unison of affections—in short, universal good—shall fill every bosom, and stimulate every heart. What must the character of the soul of man be, before he can become the fit inhabitant of such a heaven? Clearly, we human beings must be changed; we must be spiritualised; we must be lifted up to God, for God cannot be brought down to us. And when may this change be effected? Certainly not after death. If we attain not to holiness and spirituality of character while on *this* earth, we shall not attain unto the spirituality of the character which belongs to the *new* earth. What you are *here*, you will be hereafter. Heaven cannot but be a place of holiness. He therefore that is unholy can have no place therein. It appears, then, that as one part of heaven, the material part, *cannot be commenced here*, but must wait for the final restitution of all things, so, in proportion, the other part of heaven, the spiritual part, *must be commenced here*, otherwise the fruition of eternal joy never can be ours. The spiritual heaven, the temper of mind, the patience, the meekness, the purity, the love of heaven—*that*, unless we have a foretaste of it *now*, we shall not be in a capacity for enjoying hereafter.—*William J. E. Bennett, M.A.*

New Heavens and New Earth.—What is our conception of the new heaven and the new earth that we desire? Is it a mere absence of annoyances? Is it an egotism, expanded to infinitude? Is it a sensual Mohammedan paradise? Is it a selfish palace of art? Is it a city paved with gold, or a pagoda of jewels, like the Jerusalem of St. John, in its merely external aspect? Childish must we be indeed if we have not got beyond these symbols, if we do not know that man is, in his essence, a spiritual being, and that for a spiritual being there can be no felicity save in spiritual conditions—in communion with God, in serenity of mind, in purity of heart. We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, *wherein dwelleth righteousness.* Shall we ever enjoy that heaven hereafter? Yea, if we truly seek it *now.*—*Dean Farrar.*

Attainableness of Righteousness.—Is righteousness attainable by man? If it be, then the essence of God's kingdom is not beyond man's reach. If righteousness be attainable here and now, then here and now we may at least *enter* into the kingdom of heaven. Is our conception of happiness identified with righteousness? Is that the thing which we desire? Is that our ideal? Is that the one goal to which we are stretching forward in the heavenly race? If so, then for us, even here and now, "the path to heaven lies through heaven, and all the way to heaven is heaven." What sort of a condition answers to the heaven of which you dream, for which you sigh? Is it a state of things which you vaguely call glory? Is it a starry crown—the symbol of supreme self-aggrandisement? Is it a golden throne, the summit of individual exaltation? Is it the rest of an untroubled indolence? If so, our heaven may prove to be

indeed a chimera, both now and hereafter. Such notions of heaven betray the unsuspected fact that, after all, our high spiritual hopes resolve themselves into mere earthliness, into an ill-concealed amalgam of vanity and selfishness. The true conception of heaven is holiness.—*Dean Farrar.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 14—18.

The Common Teaching of the Apostles.—St. Peter's reference to St. Paul brings the relations of these two men to mind. At one time they were very strained, and from the human point of view the strain can be very simply explained. To St. Peter was entrusted the work of opening the privilege of the gospel to the Gentiles; but he could not see more than their being allowed to become Jewish Christians, holding the Christian faith, but ordered in religious conduct by Jewish regulations. St. Paul was called to extend and to liberalise his work. When the gospel was preached to men who had no Jewish associations, it was found practically impossible to put them under formal Jewish regulations, and the question immediately arose, "Are we justified in making this particular demand upon our Gentile converts?" Judaism was right enough for Jews, but was it a yoke to be put on everybody? St. Paul took a bold line. So far as Judaism represented great human principles, and broad universal expression of those principles, so far as it concerned man as man, it must be imposed on Gentiles. But so far as it was exclusive, adapted to the education, religious well-being, and ministry, of a particular race, it need have no permanence and no general applications. This was clear to St. Paul, and to his school of thought; and it must always be borne in mind that St. Paul was, throughout his life, a faithful adherent of the Jewish faith and practice. For himself he maintained a loyal allegiance to the customs of his fathers; but since he apprehended Christianity as a Divine life in the soul, rather than as a religion, he saw clearly that a particular dress in which the life *must* clothe itself, could not be forced upon everybody. But St. Peter never could quite grow out of his Jewish thought-bondages, and consequently the time came when St. Paul had openly to reprove him for what looked very much like a piece of time-serving (Gal. ii. 14). The passage now before us shows plainly that the estrangement had been removed, though its remarkable sentence, "in which are some things hard to be understood," etc. (ver. 16) indicates that there were still some things of St. Paul's teaching which he had to leave. His confidence in *him*, as a loyal and faithful fellow-servant of Jesus Christ, had been fully restored, if it had been temporarily destroyed, but concerning his teachings he had still to say, "Many men, many minds." Here St. Peter's point is, that St. Paul and he were absolutely agreed in their teachings concerning Christ's second coming, and the attitude which the Christian Church should take in relation to it.

I. **St. Paul's references to the coming of Christ.**—These are chiefly to be found in the epistles to the Corinthians and Thessalonians, and they are in some respects more minute than those of St. Peter. It might, however, be shown that St. Paul conceived the coming and the issues of the coming, from such a spiritual point of view as at least prepares for the spiritual apprehension of it which is more and more being revealed to Christ's Church.

II. **St. Paul's teaching concerning Divine delay.**—That is one great point present to St. Peter's mind; on it the doubting of the scoffers rested. He could safely plead that all the apostles had taught, that any seeming delay in the fulfilment of God's promise was but incitement to persistency and trust.

III. **St. Paul's perplexing things.**—See the hints given in the introductory portion of this Homiletic Note.

IV. **The apostolic persuasion to maintain faith, and keep on in Christian growing** (ver. 18).—See outline on "The double Christian growth." The "grace of our Lord" must mean the grace of which He is the *Giver;* while the "knowledge of our Lord" must mean the knowledge of which He is the *object.*

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 18. *Never Satisfied.*—The artist who is satisfied with his transcript of his ideal will not grow any more. There is a touching story told of a modern sculptor, who was found standing in front of his masterpiece, sunk in sad reverie; and when they asked him why he was so sad, "Because," he answered, "I am satisfied with it." "I have embodied," he would say, "all that I think and feel. There it is. And because there is no discord between what I dream, and what I can do, I feel that the limit of my growth is reached."—*A Maclaren, D.D.*

Possibilities of Goodness.—No man knows how much of goodness, nobleness, and wisdom, are possible for any man, or for himself. No bounds can be set to that progress of growth. There is no point on that happy voyage, beyond which icy cliffs and a frozen ocean forbid a passage; but before us, to the verge of our horizon of to-day, stretch the open waters. And when that farthest point of vision lies as far astern as it now gleams ahead, the same boundless, sapphire sea will draw our yearning desires, and bear onwards our advancing powers.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

Growing in Grace.—Standing in the portico of the church of S. Pietro in Vincoli, at Rome, and looking across into a convent of Maronite monks, one sees lifted against the beautiful blue of the Italian sky a magnificent palm-tree. It is very tall. It is straight as any arrow. Its stem is thick, but tapering and exquisitely graceful. And upon its summit there rests, with a real solidity, and yet at the same time with a quite external lightness, a vast and swaying coronal of leaves. As we look at it the images of the Scripture come thronging through the mind—"the righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree." And if we analyse a little the method of the flourishing of the palm, we shall find it full of analogies of what ought to be the method of advance for a righteous life. It is a tree singularly independent of external circumstances. When, in winter, there fall the copious rains, it is not greatly stimulated; when, in the summer, the fiercest heats beat down, it does not droop and wither. It maintains its uprightness. You cannot shove it much out of a straight line of growth from the earth upwards toward the heavens. The strongest tempests cannot keep it bent out of this straight line, and sometimes men have tried to hinder it from its straightness by hanging heavy weights upon it; but this has failed. It is perfect in its uprightness. Then, too, the palm is a fruitful tree. Always, in its season, does it hang out the rich clusters of its dates. Constantly does it scatter down its benefactions. Also, the palm is a tree which keeps on growing. It grows on from century even into century. It may be slow in growth, but it is sure and steady. And thus constantly, as the years pass, it is more in height and heavenwardness. It is more in bulk. It is firmer fixed in straightness. It is more affluent of shade and fruit. It is more in beauty, more in strength, more in blessing. Thus, full of growth in all directions, it is full of flourishing. Says the Scripture, "The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree." Grow thus in grace—that is the Divine injunction. How much have you grown during the past

year? How may we flourish in grace, as the palm flourishes?

I. **If we would grow thus in grace, it must be the supreme idea of our lives to do it.**—As a man thinks, etc., in his heart, *so* is he. There are such people in the Churches as *minimum* Christians. Here is the main secret of much of our puny and miserable spiritual growth. We are not, and hardly want to be, *maximum* Christians. Unless it be our idea to be such, we can never be such.

II. **We must grow in grace by prayer.**—Prayer in its results is *subjective*; it brings us into harmony and relation with God. But prayer is more than this, what Dr. Bushnell calls "dumb-bell" notion of it. Prayer is a real grasping of objective benefits. We get by Divine gift what we pray for—chiefly grace.

III. **We must grow in grace by knowledge.**—The Bible is the sustenance and nutriment of spiritual growth. There are too many spiritual fasters from this Divine nutriment.

IV. **We must grow in grace by actual resolving to grow, and by pressing resolution into action.**—We dream too much toward nobler grace; we do not enough strenuously *do* toward nobler grace.—*Anon.*

The Christian's Double Growth.—At the starting of the religious life of a new year what word may fittingly recall to our minds the responsibilities of our Christian profession? Will this one be helpful which I would suggest as our motto? We want one that at once suggests an estimate of our past, and inspires us to more watchful and earnest endeavour in the days to come. We want one that, during the year, will recall to us our solemn obligations. This text says to each one of us, Have you been growing in the spiritual life this year? And it says to each one of us, Remember, you must grow in the spiritual life, or that life will surely shrivel, and fade, and die. The Revised Version reads the sentence, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." But the Greek is not quite clear, and the idea suggested by the Authorised Version, on which we now dwell, is fully in accord with the teachings of both Peter and Paul. The growth should be in character, which is the soul's health, and in knowledge, which is one side of the nourishment of the soul's health. Grow like your Divine Master, grow in graciousness and grow in wisdom. So growing, grow in favour with God and man. In the Christian life growth is essential, and healthy growth will take two directions, the line of character, and the line of knowledge. Like the trees, there will be growth in the branchings of character, and growth in the rootings of knowledge, and there never can be healthy growing of the one apart from the harmonious, healthy growing of the other. "That we may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head." Peter, in this epistle, gives the details of character-growth: "Adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; and in your virtue knowledge; and in your knowledge temperance; and in your temperance patience; and in your patience godliness; and in your godliness love of the brethren; and in your love of the brethren, love. For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful." Paul, in the epistle to the Colossians, gives suggestions concerning growth in spiritual knowledge: "And to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God."

I. **In the Christian life growth is essential.**—It is in all life. We are troubled about our garden plants if they do not grow. There must be something wrong with them. The child that does not grow in body cannot be in health. We call the poor creature an idiot that does not grow in mind. All around us every-

thing is growing, and we share a life whose sign of activity is growth. That must be true of spiritual life which is true of the physical. As a man in Christ, I may say, "While I live I grow, and while I grow I know that I live." It may be that soul-growth cannot be watched, and sometimes cannot even be discerned. It may even be better for us that it should be impossible for us to trace it, and that we can only get an idea of our progress at long and distant intervals. Something may happen to surprise us by revealing what growth and progress we have made in the spiritual life, just as moments of surprise come to us when we realise that the girl we so long have watched is no longer a child.

"The child is a woman.
The book may close over; now all the lessons are said."

It is but reminding of familiar things to say that growth depends on nourishment and exercise. And that must be as true of soul-growth as it certainly is of body-growth. There is appropriate soul-food, and suitable soul-exercise; and there cannot be spiritual health and development where these are neglected or misused. And we have been reminded that growth depends upon healthy surroundings, sanitary atmospheres, and inspiriting daily conditions. Growth depends on cherished cheerfulness of spirit, pleasant toil, kept within wise limitations, and the brightening influence of daily friendships. Pure homes, judicious and well-ordered measures, help to secure both physical and moral growth; and spiritual atmospheres, surroundings, and associations are in every way as essential for securing soul-growth. This is very familiar truth, but we may set it before us once again. It is not so familiar to say that moral and spiritual growth depend on will and effort. We grow if we want to grow. The athlete who wants to grow muscle for the strain of the coming contest, puts his will into the matter, makes the necessary effort, and grows by force of will. You remember how one of our greatest novel writers makes one of his characters die simply because "she would not make an effort." It would help us if we clearly realised that the soul-growth which is essential to soul-life is no happy accident, no unconscious process, going on in a natural way, whether we will it or not. It is a growth under conditions, just as truly as is the growth of the vines you are training in the glass houses, and the arrangement of those conditions is a matter of our will and effort. A man who means to ensure the growth of his soul must use the means, and he has no right to complain of flaccid spiritual muscles, and the terrible feeling of soul-weakness, if he makes little or no effort to ensure the conditions of spiritual growth. "If we be living Christians—true men—we are growing." What happens when living things cease to grow? You can see what happens in the trees. Deadly fungus comes upon the branch that will not grow. There is no possible halting place for us. To stop is to go back. Fail to use power and you must lose the power; and losing our power is but death in its beginnings. Sometimes one inclines to ask, Do old people cease to grow bodily? I think not. They grow right on to the end, only there are forces of decay at work which mate and master the forces of growth. Certainly it is true spiritually that growth never ceases, but while "the outward man perisheth, the inward man is renewed day by day." Never, while we tarry amid these mortal scenes, do we cease soul-growth. Never do we cease to need the means of soul-growth. Shall we look seriously at this matter? We are alive unto God. The sign of life is growth. Growth depends on conditions. Those conditions are largely within our control. And therefore the word of the apostle comes close home to us, and should be an inspiration. "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ."

II. **In the Christian life growth**

takes two directions.—1. In grace. It is said of the Divine Youth of Nazareth, that he "grew in grace," and that sums up the development of amiable, high-principled, beautiful, and gracious character. In something of that sense we may venture to take the word "grace" in our text. Bodily life has a tone, a character. Spiritual life has a tone, a character. Sometimes the Christian virtues and graces are spoken of as if they were the garments which the soul was required to put on. Thus the apostle Paul says, "Put on, therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another. And above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of perfectness." And Peter would have us "be clothed with humility." But here character is rather thought of as something which we are to *grow into*. We know how our boys and girls, under the varied influences of their childhood and youth, grow into their characters; get this and that corrected or removed, and this and that settled in, and made their own. We watch the process with the intensest interest, ready with all wise training and gracious help. In the little child we note the possibilities; in the growing boy we see them unfolding; in the young man stepping forth into life we expect to see principles established, and virtue and grace confirmed. And if we get a deeper view of mature life, we find it is still a growing into character, up into the ideal character set before us in the Lord Jesus Christ. What are we with the weight of years upon us but the Lord's—the Eternal Father's—boys and girls, who are growing up into our heavenly character? But the word "grace" seems to suggest the characteristic feature of Christian character. It is dominated by the passive virtues. The character-fruits wrought by the Spirit are quiet, modest, patient, gentle things, such as these: "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." If natural character develops well, we have all the characteristics of the high-souled gentleman. If the spiritual character develops well, we have all the characteristics of the Christ-toned Christian. And there is no more beautiful thing upon this sin-stained earth of ours than the sanctified, amiable man, unless it be the sanctified, amiable woman. I have known such, and never have lost, and never shall lose, their holy power upon me; women who grew into such lovely, saintly characters that they seemed to have caught the fragrance of Christ, and you breathed it whenever you came near to these lovely flowers. If we could only grow in grace like that! But what a business this character-growth is! Some of us have got very weary of trying to keep it up. It has seemed to be no use trying, so we have let the thing go, become careless about the means of grace which would have helped it, and half said to ourselves, "Never mind if we are no better Christians to end the year than we were to begin it." I can sympathise with you. More than once I have been almost giving up the struggle, and contentedly letting things go. So we may say to one another, "Forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those that are before, let us press toward the mark, for the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus." Let us begin again, fully resolved that we will grow in grace, grow into the Christly character, and so win, for Christ's service, the highest power, the sanctified power that we *are*—that we have become. Good growth is always slow. So we will not be disheartened if the goal of our hope keeps far away. The very growing is healthy. 2. In knowledge. And the sphere of the knowledge is very clearly defined. "In the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." *Ward Beecher* says, "While sense is the source of physical or scientific knowledge, disposition is the source of the knowledge of moral truth: it depends upon the exercise of moral feelings." The apostles constantly urge this growth in the knowledge of

God. And their doing so indicated keen observation of some of the most serious perils of Christian life. Growth in knowledge is the great antidote and medicine for some of the gravest Christian diseases. Religion is feeling, and can never be dissociated from feeling; but feeling is a good slave that is always trying to become master, and then works well-nigh irrecoverable mischiefs. Separate growth in knowledge from your Christian life, and you will become sentimental or superstitious. You will take up with a routine of religious observances, or you will pine for crowded and excited religious meetings, and popular preachers, and foolishly imagine that you have gained a real blessing because you have been made to feel. One of the most universally working natural laws is this: overstrain any emotion, and you inevitably weaken, and you may destroy, the capacity of that emotion. Remember this: excited feeling never strengthens the will, never confirms principle. You may enjoy it, but the after-lassitude is the moment for which our soul-tempter keenly watches. Our Lord knew the perils of excited meetings, and studiously avoided them. The apostles never unduly arouse feeling, and they persistently urge growth in Christian knowledge as the necessary accompaniment of growth in grace. But let us see carefully what knowledge it is that the apostle commends. It is precisely this: the knowledge of Christ the Centre; "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Paul wants to know Him; and our Lord Himself said, "This is life eternal, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." In our days peculiar attention is being given to the person and mission of the Lord Jesus, and there is no sign of the times more important and more hopeful. But we Christians must throw ourselves fully into the study, and persist in it that the Christ can only be known by the quickened, sanctified, and Divinely guided intellect. This way and that men are trying to shake down our primary beliefs. Our security against criticism, on the one hand, and against religious sentimentality, on the other—the two supreme perils of our age—lies in giving ourselves fully and freely to the understanding of the beautiful and blessed earth-life of our Divine Lord. And it is the knowledge of all that circle of truth of which Christ is the centre. Everything in which Christ was interested interests us. And the circle is broader and larger than we think. Have we not something to regret in the past in relation to this growth in Christian knowledge? Have we really cared about it? Have we longed rather for something emotional, something sensational? Have we enjoyed the services, when we were only told what we knew? Then look at this text. "Grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." But it is well to face this fact: growth in Christian knowledge is a very trying thing; and so many shrink from it, or are afraid of it. It involves leaving past forms of knowledge behind, just as the boys leave behind their little school jackets when they step up into manhood; but nobody says anything evil about the forms of knowledge or the jackets; they belonged to their time, and did very well then. I know a minister who has been thirty years in the ministry, and boasts that he thinks to-day about the great religious verities exactly the same as he thought when he left college. I don't think I could say that I would express any one of those verities as I did thirty years ago. We must grow. Let us accept the disabilities of our growth, and look kindly upon those thought-forms which properly belonged to our spiritual childhood, but were the steps up which we have passed to gain the higher apprehensions of to-day. Grow—but keep Christ the centre. The twofold growth—in character and knowledge—is essential. Both must go together. Try to conceive the case of a Christian in whom there has been growth of character without growth of knowledge. Keep that plant in the hothouse. It

will not do for the workaday world. Try to conceive the case of a Christian in whom there has been growth of knowledge without growth of character. Keep that man in a study. He has no sweet brotherliness and Christly charity for the fellowships of life. Both are imperfect types. There is no fruitage to the glory of God from any tree that does not grow—and keep on growing—two ways—up and down. Let us set all our hearts upon securing the double growth? Then we shall have to mend our ways of private culture. Then we shall have to mend our ways of mutual help. How do we make things grow? Not by any direct action upon them. We do this: we try to give them the right environments, the surroundings and atmosphere which will inspire and help growth. Finding the environment in which our souls can grow is our life-work.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Ver. 12. *Ready for the Voyage.*—The Christian, at his death, should not be like the child, who is forced by the rod to quit his play; but like one who is wearied of it, and willing to go to bed. Neither ought he to be like the mariner whose vessel is drifted by the violence of the tempest from the shore, tossed to and fro upon the ocean, and at last suffers wreck and destruction; but like one who is ready for the voyage, and, the moment the wind is favourable, cheerfully weighs anchor, and, full of hope and, joy, launches forth into the deep.—*Gotthold's "Emblems."*

Influence of Fire upon the Earth.—"What has fire done upon the earth? Fire has only re-constructed and destroyed. Nothing has found an origin in fire. Fire itself is an effect, and not a cause; it is in the atmosphere, it is in the flint in the earth, it is in the water; in each it is a thing by itself, unseen or unfelt; certain conditions bring it into active existence, but it cannot be traced in either element as a matter of course; yet it is here, there, and everywhere: it has built up Cotopaxi to the height of 18,000 feet; Teneriffe has been shot up by its labours from an unknown depth beneath the sea to 12,000 feet above it; Etna is heaped up with lava, ashes, and scoriæ some 11,000 feet; Iceland has grown into a great island under its influence; and Vesuvius has grown to a height of 3,751 feet, from a reconstruction of earthy matter by force."—*Malet.*

Ver. 16. *Bible Difficulties.*—An old man once said, "For a long period I puzzled myself about the difficulties of Scripture, until at last I came to the resolution that reading the Bible was like eating fish. When I find a difficulty, I lay it aside and call it a *bone*. Why should I choke over the bone when there is so much nutritious meat for me? Some day, perhaps, I may find that even the bone may afford me nourishment." I remember reading that, in cutting down an oak, that must have been two hundred years old at the very least, there was found, in the very heart of the oak, a musket bullet. When it was stated to the peasants and villagers that it was so, they said it must be a trick—that the woodmen must have stuck it in, and pretended that it was found in the oak. But when men of science and practical knowledge investigated it, they found it was beyond all doubt that the bullet was in the very heart of the oak, and there was no opening by which it could be inserted, and no symptoms of a rent by which it could have been admitted. But a country gentleman in the place turned over the leaves of his history, and he discovered that in that very forest, when that tree must have been a mere sapling, a great battle was fought; that the presumption, nay, the certainty, was, that a bullet had fastened in the sapling; that, as it grew and broadened in bulk, in size, in form, for two hundred years, it had grown over the bullet, and the bullet had come to be imbedded and inserted in the very heart of it, without any opening by which it could have entered in past times; and thus the difficulty, that perplexed at first, became solved and easily explained by further and more extensive research. In the same manner, when we meet with difficulties in Scripture, when we cannot explain them to-day, lay them up for investigation to-morrow; and you will find that, as we grow in light, in practical experience, in research, in study, the things which seemed impossible a few years ago, will only seem difficult and hard to be understood to-day, and that, in the course of a year or two, all will be so plain that a wayfaring man can understand it, and need not err therein.—*Dr. Cumming.*

THE FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF JOHN.

INTRODUCTION.

The earliest Christian traditions ascribe the authorship of five of the New Testament books to the apostle John—the gospel, three epistles, and the book of Revelation. The burden of proof rests on those who doubt or deny the Johannine authorship of either one of them. Eusebius regards the authorship of this first epistle as undisputed. It is, however, remarkable that the author's name is not given in either the gospel or the epistles, and that, although the name John is found in the book of Revelation, it is not so given as to make us absolutely sure that the *apostle* John is referred to.

Our confidence in the Johannine authorship of the first epistle really rests upon its similarity of style, phraseology, and thought to the gospel. And this is the more impressive because no style could present more marked peculiarities than that of the fourth gospel. The similarity deeply impresses a reader of the English translation, but it is much more striking to a reader of the original Greek.

The similarity of the subject-matter and doctrine, or setting of the Christian truth, is even more important. "The epistle appears to have been intended as a companion to the gospel. It is a comment on the gospel, 'a sermon with the gospel for its text.' References to the gospel are scattered thickly over the whole epistle. The object of the gospel is stated in John xx. 31—'These have been written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in His name'; and the similar object of the epistle is stated in 1 John v. 13—'These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God.' The gospel is written to show the way to eternal life through belief in the incarnate Son. The epistle is written to confirm and enforce the gospel, to assure those who believe in the incarnate Son that they *have* eternal life. The one is an historical, the other

an ethical, statement of the truth. Of necessity, both writings, in stating the truth, oppose error; but with this difference: in the gospel St. John simply states the truth and leaves it; in the epistle he commonly, over against the truth, places the error to which it is opposed. St. John's gospel has been called a summary of Christian theology, his first epistle a summary of Christian ethics. In the gospel the fundamental doctrines of Christianity are given as the foundation of the Christian's *faith*; in the epistle they are given as the foundation of the Christian's *life*. To sum up the relations of the gospel to the epistle, we may say that the gospel is objective, the epistle subjective; the one is historical, the other moral; the one gives us the theology of the Christ, the other the ethics of the Christian; the one is didactic, the other polemical; the one states the truth as a thesis, the other as an antithesis; the one starts from the human side, the other from the Divine; the one proves that the man Jesus is the Son of God, the other insists that the Son of God is come in the flesh. But the connection between the two is intimate and organic throughout. The gospel suggests principles of conduct which the epistle lays down explicitly; the epistle implies facts which the gospel states as historically true" (*A. Plummer, D.D.*).

As to the plan of the epistle, but little can be said. We cannot expect from the meditative and mystical John an orderly treatise such as we may get from the logical and trained intellect of Paul. Such a man as St. John always has certain main ideas, and these decide his selection of subjects, and give tone and colour to his treatment of them. He tells us what he feels, rather than what he thinks—though we should recognise that thought may be deep and real when it is controlled by feeling. No one has ever given a satisfactory analysis of the epistle; and it may be wiser not to attempt one, but to divide it simply under the two headings, God is light, and God is love. The practical applications of the first truth bring to view what our "walking in the light" involves; and of the second truth what privileges and obligations attend our relation to the Divine love, as the sons of God.

For homiletic purposes the following general outline of the contents may be found suggestive:—

I. The true nature of fellowship with God, who is light and love, requiring purity and holiness (chaps. i.—ii. 29).

II. The blessings and duties of sonship. The privilege of adoption demands the corresponding duty of conformity to Christ, the true Son (chaps. iii.—iv. 6).

III. The essential bond of fellowship and sonship is love, both to the Father and to one another (chaps. iv. 7—v. 12). (*Oxf. Bible, Ap.*)

Webster says: "From the general tenor of the epistle, it is clear that the integrity of religious profession had been destroyed by the absence of Christian charity. Moreover, there were false teachers, who endeavoured to overturn the foundation of Christianity by inculcating doubts as to the Divine and human natures in the person of Jesus Christ. The apostle does not strike one by one the dangers of the age, but strikes at the root of them all (chaps. iv. 21, v. 1). At the same time it is evident, from the undoubtedly polemical tone which pervades the epistle, that the apostle had in view some special antagonism to '*the*

truth as it is in Jesus.' It will appear, we think, that this was substantially the heresy of those early Gnostics known as the Docetæ, who denied the reality of Christ's human nature, considering His flesh and blood to be a mere illusory appearance (see 1 John ii. 22, iv. 3; 2 John 7); for though the idealistic philosophy of the Docetæ was not fully developed before the second century, its germ existed in the apostolic age."

Bengel's view of the writer's design is thus given: "Id agit ut beata et sancta cum Deo et Jesu Christo communio fidelium confirmetur."

The Gnosticism of St. John's Later Life.

The principal points in which Gnosticism, in the closing days of St. John's life, had departed from the truth of the gospel, were (1) in its doctrine of the person of Christ and of God, and (2) in its doctrine of sensual sinlessness. The latter point is dealt with by the apostle mainly in his first epistle, the former mainly in his gospel. To this, therefore, we here confine ourselves. According to the Gnostics (of whom Hymenæus, Philetus, Nicolas, and Cerinthus may be taken as types), God was in His essence far too exalted, pure, and spiritual ever to come directly into contact with matter in any form. Whatever He did in the way of creation, providence, etc., was done through the instrumentality of an inferior being, a demiurge. God Himself was an inapproachable, inactive, quiescent Being, interfering in no respect with mundane or material affairs. Certainly, then, God was not incarnate in Christ. A Divine emanation, a Spirit of God, no doubt rested on Christ, descending upon Him, however, not at His birth, but at His baptism—Jesus, up to this time, having been simply a man. In their further view of Christ's life the Gnostics were divided. Some held that from the time of His baptism the human nature of Christ was a mere appearance or phantom, so that it was only in appearance that He suffered, died, and rose again. Others held that the man Jesus did indeed truly suffer, die, and rise again, but not *the Christ*—since, according to them, the Divine Spirit was not personally united to Him, but only acted through Him as occasion required, and had no part whatever in those weaknesses and contingencies (as weariness, hunger, pain, and death) which belonged to His manhood. In all these things, therefore, it was not the Christ that suffered, but simply the man Jesus of Nazareth (*G. Warington*).

It is not easy to define Gnosticism. It was a sort of philosophy of religion. We may describe it as a series of imaginative speculations respecting the origin of the universe, and its relation to the supreme Being. It had in the main two ground principles which run through all the bewildering varieties of Gnostic systems: 1. The supremacy of the intellect, and the superiority of enlightenment to faith and conduct. This is the *Greek* element in Gnosticism. 2. The absolutely evil character of matter and everything material. This is the *Oriental* element.

The historical and moral character of the gospel, which brings it within the reach of the humblest intellectual power, was set on one side as valueless, or

fantastically explained away. Spiritual excellence was made to consist, not in a holy life, but in knowledge of an esoteric kind, open only to the initiated who "knew the depths," and could say, "This is profound" (*A. Plummer, D.D.*).

John, the Beloved Apostle.

Peter, James, John, and Andrew formed the first group of men in the apostolic body; but Peter's strong personality dominated the group, so that it is difficult to realise the marked individuality of the others. Of Andrew we know virtually nothing. Of James we know nothing personally except his martyrdom by Herod; he is always associated with John, and seems to have been the elder brother. John is remarkable for his modesty, his gentle and retiring disposition. He was present at the greater scenes of our Lord's life. But in no case does he ever press to the front, and no words spoken by him appear to be recorded, save his asking the Master to indicate the betrayer. Even in the early Church John keeps in the background, and in the gospel he is assumed to have written he never separately mentions his own name. This fact may help to explain why Jesus called the two brothers "Sons of Thunder." James, the elder brother, was the man with the spirit of the zealot, who gave the family characteristic; and the name marks *his* personality rather than that of John.

But though keeping ever in the background, John belongs to the first group, by a very subtle power of leadership, which often characterises men of his type. His influence is recognisable everywhere; it even affected his Divine Master; it was very powerful on Peter, his friend; it toned the relations of the whole apostolic company. To a surface view Peter is the dominant spirit; but he really is not. He is swayed more than he knows by John. To a deeper view John is the dominant spirit—the man with the personal fascination which everybody felt, to which everybody yielded. That personal power explains the beautiful traditions which have gathered round his story. Peter was the man of action; James was the man of energy; John was the man of motives, who inspired action, toned energy, and ennobled all relations.

It is strange that we should feel to know John so well, seeing that we can get so little material on which to form our judgment of him. We can never get John alone. We can never even get him alone with his Master. Probably our ideas of him are mainly formed from the impression which the gospel and epistles which bear his name produce upon us; but partly also from the loving traditions which have been preserved concerning him. It may be well to see how scanty our materials are. 1. In the synoptic gospels there is no more than the mention of his name, his relation to Zebedee, his partnership with Simon, and his presence, with James and Peter, at the house of Jairus, at the Transfiguration, and in Gethsemane. In none of these cases is he stated to have said or done anything that could specially reveal him to us. He was with his brother when the man was forbidden to preach Christ if he did not follow Him, and when the request was made that a judgment of fire should come on the Samaritan village; but these things were

in the mood of the zealot James, rather than of the gentle and sympathetic John. The chief impression we get from the synoptic gospels is that John always kept behind his brother, and let *him* speak, just as afterwards, in the early Church, he kept behind his friend Peter, and let *him* speak.

In the fourth gospel a person is named as the "disciple," "another disciple," "the disciple whom Jesus loved," "who also leaned on His breast," and it is assumed that this is the modest way in which John alludes to himself.

In the Acts of the Apostles John is never referred to save as associated with Peter. Paul only mentions him with James and Cephas, as the three who seemed to be "pillars" of the Church at Jerusalem. No name is signed to the gospel; the first epistle does not begin with a name, or within its limits indicate an authorship; the second and third epistles give the writer only the vague name of the "elder"; and the book of Revelation helps us very little, for the writer does not call himself "John the apostle," but only "John, who also am your brother."

It is so remarkable, and it is the evidence of a strong personality, that, though the notices of him are so limited and unsatisfactory, he nevertheless has impressed himself so strongly on the Christian mind that we feel to know John quite as well as we know Peter.

One of the gravest discussions of modern Biblical criticism concerns the authorship of the fourth gospel and the three epistles. What will satisfy most Bible readers is the manifest harmony of tone, thought, and feeling between these writings, and the apostle of whom it could be said as a characteristic, "Jesus loved him, and he leaned on His breast." Whether John wrote the book of Revelation need not now be considered. If he did, the mood he was in was a peculiar one; and it is quite possible that John's character has been misjudged, because he has been too much mixed up with his brother James, and because he has been supposed to have written the highly imaginative and difficult book of Revelation. Such misjudgments may be detected in what is, on the whole, the very suggestive and revealing estimate of *Dean Farrar*: "St. John and St. Peter—the one the symbol of the contemplative, the other of the practical, life—are undoubtedly the grandest and most attractive figures in the apostolic band. The character of St. John has been often mistaken. Filled as he was with a most Divine tenderness—realising as he did to a greater extent than any of the apostles the full depth and significance of our Lord's new commandment—rich as his epistles and his gospel are with a meditative and absorbing reverence—dear as he has ever been in consequence to the heart of the mystic and the saint—yet he was something indefinitely far removed from that effeminate pietist which has furnished the usual type under which he has been represented. The name Boanerges, or 'Sons of Thunder,' which he shared with his brother James; their joint petition for precedence in the kingdom of God; their passionate request to call down fire from heaven on the offending village of the Samaritans; the burning energy of the *patois* in which the Apocalypse is written; the impetuous horror with which, according

to tradition, St. John recoiled from the presence of the heretic Cerinthus,—all show that in him was the spirit of the eagle, which, rather than the dove, has been his immemorial symbol. And since zeal and enthusiasm have ever been indispensable instruments in spreading the kingdom of heaven, doubtless it was the existence of these elements in his character, side by side with tenderness and devotion, which endeared him so greatly to his Master, and made him 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' The wonderful depth and power of his imagination; the rare combination of contemplativeness and passion, of strength and sweetness, in the same soul; the perfect faith which inspired his devotion, and the perfect love which precluded fear,—these were the gifts and graces which rendered him worthy of leaning his young head on the bosom of his Lord."

Such a combination is certainly unusual and almost unnatural; and it may well be doubted whether this is the *kind* of strength that was a characteristic of John. The gentle-spirited, loving man is generally weak when he attempts to do the impulsive and energetic. His power lies in steady and persistent influence rather than in sudden efforts. His is a personal force, related to what he *is* rather than to what he *does*; and when John was freed from the association of his zealot brother, and was his simple self, there is no sign whatever of the zealot spirit in him. He was a strong man, a born leader; but he was not strong as Peter was strong, or as James was strong, though both Peter and James felt *his* strength, the strength of the moisture that sunders the cliffs against which the huge waves dash themselves in vain.

Of the traditions that have been preserved concerning him, the most characteristic and revealing one is that which relates how, toward the very end of his life, when he was so infirm that he had to be carried to the church, and was too weak to preach, he used to say no more than this, "Little children, love one another." His hearers at last wearied of this, and said, "Master, why dost thou always say this?" "It is the Lord's command," he replied; "and if this alone is done, it is enough."

This estimate of John can be fully sustained if we separate him from his brother, and then see how he reveals himself to us (1) in his associations with Jesus; (2) in his friendship with Peter; and (3) in his gospel and epistles, regarded as the work of his advanced life.

I. **John reveals himself to us in his associations with Jesus.**—We might call him the silent, receptive disciple, and class him with Mary of Bethany, who "sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His words," helping Jesus so much by those uplifted eyes—those "homes of silent prayer"—and that sweet receptivity which can always draw out from a man his very best. Jesus could talk to John, for John did not want to talk. What Jesus said to him he knew John would treasure, not in his mere memory, but in an altogether safer place, in his heart. John never wanted to discuss things; he was no critic, and no theologian; he wanted to think over things, to brood over things; and by-and-by he would be able to tell you them all again, with a strange and most attractive personal glow upon them. John was the kind of student whom the teaching-master is

sure to love; and he is the student who always gets the best of the Master's work. It is no wonder that this disciple Jesus loved. Jesus felt that personal fascination of the gentle, thoughtful, loving John just as every one else did. And we may be quite sure that many a considerate little attention was paid to Jesus by one who watched him day by day with so much thoughtful love. There was established a special confidence between them. There must have been many a whispering, and many a revealing sign, before John could have ventured to put down his head that day on his Lord's shoulder, and gently say, "Lord, which is he that betrayeth Thee?"

That was a much more simple thing to do than we are wont to assume. Strangely indeed it is supposed that intensely patriotic and bigoted Jews adopted the Roman *triclinia* for the most sacred rite of their religion; and it has been a sore puzzle to explain how a man reclining on a couch could lay his head on his neighbour's breast. *Leonardo da Vinci* pictures the disciples sitting on forms beside a long and narrow table, and then it must have been a very conspicuous thing for John to lean on his Master's bosom. But, of course, the Jews kept the Passover Feast *in Jewish style*, seated on their feet, on mats that were arranged on the floor, round a small low table; and then it was the simplest thing possible for a neighbour to put down his head on his neighbour's shoulder; and this was what John did. A simple, beautiful, revealing incident, that shows the Master to us, and shows us John. John was one of those men who call out love, who can be loved, who can help others by letting them love him, and who can responsively meet love with love.

Do we sufficiently realise that we serve Christ and our fellows, in the sweetest and most gracious way, just by being lovable, and making every one love us? John served Jesus as no other person, except Mary of Bethany, ever did, by drawing out towards him his Lord's personal affection. John never knew what a comfort and help that *lovingness* of his always was to the Lord. We are constantly talking about what we can *do* for Christ, and urging one another to *do* something, or something more. And we miss seeing that to *be* gentle, loving, sympathetic, and receptive, as John was, serves Christ even better than our *doings* in His service. To *be* attractive to Him, so that He can find personal pleasure in us—do we think enough of that? Yet of *that* the beloved John is the great example.

II. **John reveals himself in his friendship with Peter.**—It was a case of pure and helpful friendship, that was as beautiful as the familiar friendship of David and Jonathan. There must have been basal likenesses in the two men to make the friendship possible. There must have been marked differences in order to make the friendship interesting, and mutually helpful. They became friends when working at the fishing together; and if we may read their friendship by the light of similar cases, we should say that John influenced Peter much more powerfully than Peter influenced John. The matured and restrained character is always more influential than the impulsive; and there is a secret leading which is altogether more powerful than the self-asserting man can ever gain. In this friendship John never appears prominent, and never has much

to say; but it is easy to read between the lines, and trace the power he exerted on his friend. Nothing could be more tender and gracious than his ways at the time of Peter's fall. He had secured Peter's admission to the high priest's palace; so he felt in some sense responsible for the temptation which overwhelmed him. Peter "went out and wept bitterly"; and we may be sure that John went out too, and helped his friend in that time of humiliation; for when Peter is introduced to us again, John is with him, and their friendship seems closer and tenderer than ever, so that Peter even can forget himself, and ask the Divine Master what blessing He has for his friend. It would even seem as if that hour of stern experiences had so deepened the spiritual life of Peter, that for a time he gained an unusual power over John. For when they both ran to the sepulchre at the news of the Resurrection, though John outran Peter, it was Peter who found the courage to venture into the tomb, and his doing so drew in his friend John. It was an unspeakable blessing to Peter to have such a friend as John. Peter was the kind of man who must not be interfered with. You must let him talk, and yourself say nothing. You must let him give you advice, and never attempt to give him any. You must do what he tells you, but never tell him what to do. And John was the kind of man who could constantly interfere with Peter, without his suspecting it, or attempting to resist.

And is not that the truly invaluable kind of friend? He never humbles us, but he is constantly keeping us straight. His very presence calms us: we never see him without feeling better and wiser. Even in the New Testament records, in the Acts of the Apostles, have you noticed what a half-fear we have that Peter will do something imprudent if he is alone? We do not feel quite sure of him even at Lydda and Joppa. But we know it is quite right if John is with him. That is the revelation of a character and disposition in John which, when repeated nowadays, secures for us our dearest and most helpful life friendship. If we are to be friends, we may well want to be such friends as John was.

III. **John reveals himself in his writings, in his gospel and epistles.**—On this point a hint or two may be given, but elaborate treatment is impossible. He was altogether remarkable for his keen insight of spiritual things. Paul had the masculine characteristic, and loved to think a thing out. John had the feminine characteristic, and saw at once the conclusion which Paul laboriously reached. Paul's key-note was faith; John's was love. Faith reposes on conclusions. Love grasps persons, and imagines all lovely things as associated with the person. Or we may say that to Paul faith is belief, to John faith is trust.

That spiritual insight brought forcibly to John three truths. One of these he embodied especially in his gospel, the other two in his epistles. It was in the line of his characteristic disposition to make much of the person of Christ. Christ Himself was of absorbing interest to John. He delighted to think about His graciousness and about His mystery; so John's gospel touches but lightly what Jesus did, or what Jesus said, save as His sayings revealed what

Jesus *was*. John is ever trying rightly to understand Jesus Himself, and to make his reader understand Him. *Godet* puts this distinction somewhat skilfully: "In the mind of St. Paul, the idea of *salvation* predominates; in St. John, that of the *Saviour*. It is in the fact of deliverance that Paul finds the Liberator, in salvation itself that he discovers the Author of salvation. In the mind of John, on the other hand, the person of the Liberator takes precedence; salvation is to him only an emanation from the Saviour, Jesus Himself communicating Himself to the soul."

Concerning the person of Christ, what John saw at once, and saw ever more clearly, was the double truth of His humanity and His Divinity. It would seem as if he was supremely jealous of his Lord's veritable humanity; and yet his gospel is a series of holy persuasions of the truth of His Divinity. John brings you into the presence of his Friend, the "Man Christ Jesus"; but he never leaves you until you can see in Him what he can so plainly see, the "Son of God with power." To John the Man he knew so well is ever "manifesting forth His glory," that we might believe on Him.

And in relation to the person of Christ, the two impressions which were deepened by advancing years in the apostle, and find the most attractive setting in his epistles, were the stainless purity of Christ, and the deathless love of Christ. That purity he saw to be the inspiration of righteousness in Christ's disciples. That love he saw to be the inspiration of fellowship, union, self-sacrificing brotherhood, in Christ's disciples. "He that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." "He that loveth God love his brother also."

We have been brought into the near presence of a delightful man, naturally amiable in disposition, with an unusual personal fascination that everybody felt—a man with natural amiability sanctified, as it only can be sanctified, by the closest personal fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. And I want to be sure that one thing is pressed home on all our hearts—that about one thing we are all set thinking. Character brings the truest nearness to Christ, and the fullest revelations of Christ. John was not the "beloved disciple" because he was unusually clever, but because he was lovable. We often think we shall never really know Christ, since the holy mystery of Him is altogether beyond our mental grasp. John teaches us that Christ is best apprehended by the *soul*; that if we are in any degree like Him, we shall be able to see Him; and that the more we are like Him, the better—the more clearly and the more fully—we shall see Him.

And this character-apprehension of Christ is no sign of weakness. It is perfectly consistent with the truest moral strength. John was in no sense weak or sentimental. You must be feeling that, after all, John was the really strong man of the apostolic company—stronger than zealot James, stronger than assertive Peter, stronger even than intellectual Paul. Let love be the key-note of character, and we shall nobly minister to Christ our Master, and strongly influence all who come within our reach.

The Peculiarities of St. John's Theology.

Biblical theology undertakes to define the various types of teaching which are found in sacred Scripture. It aims to distinguish each type as sharply as possible from every other, in order to set the given writer's method of thought, and style, and argument in the strongest relief. No type of New Testament teaching has more of individuality than the Johannine; none has characteristics at once more marked, and more difficult to define. Prominent among St. John's peculiarities is the tendency to group his thoughts around certain great central truths. In the gospel, and in the first epistle, his thought moves out from certain formative and determining conceptions which he has of his subject. The prologue to his gospel is designed to present the apostle's loftiest conception of the person of his Master, and of His relation to mankind. So the epistle opens with a reference to eternity, in which the content of the gospel message was stored up ready to come to the world in Christ. In both cases this secret of God which is to be disclosed to mankind is *life* or *light*. St. John grounds the work of Christ in His person. The incarnate life of Jesus is the "transactional" revelation of principles and forces which are essential and eternal in His very being. His bringing of life and light to men, on His mission to earth, was grounded in the larger and deeper truth that He had always been illumining the minds of men. All through the Old Testament period of revelation the true light of the Logos was shining into the lives, not of the Jews only, but of all men. This fact, again, was based on the essential nature of the Logos, who was with God in the beginning, and was God. But in the development of his thought St. John starts from this last and highest point. Thus the specific Messianic mission of Jesus to earth is grounded in His universal relation to the world and man, and this relation, in turn, is grounded in His essential nature. In accord with this mode of thought we find that the action of God is always conceived of as springing from the Divine nature. What God has done in revelation and redemption it was according to His nature to do. In revealing Himself to men in Christ He has expressed under a personal form His own thoughts, feelings, and will. God has come to the world in Christ. In the epistle he deduces his whole teaching concerning the nature and demands of the Christian life from the idea of the ethical nature of God.

This peculiarity of thought, which centralises ideas in their logical source or ground, is pervading and fundamental in the writings of St. John. The apostle's mind penetrates to the heart of things, and dwells in rapt contemplation upon those deepest realities with which all true religion is mainly concerned. Religion is altogether a matter of personal relations. It is God-likeness—fellowship with Christ, sympathy with His Spirit, fraternal helpfulness among men. His treatment of the truths of religion is intensely ethical and spiritual; it is characterised by an intense sense of God. To St. John the life, teaching, and death of Jesus are the language in which God has written out most plainly His deepest thoughts and feelings toward mankind.

Just as the acts of God flow out of His nature, and the work of Christ is

grounded on what He is, so the acts and choices of men are determined by what the men are in their fixed preferences and character. This correspondence between character and conduct St. John does not conceive after the manner of philosophical determinism; he treats it as the result of an ethical necessity. It naturally results from this mode of view that man is regarded as a unit in all his powers and actions. All the acts of a man involve his total personality. To know the truth is to possess it as a determining power in one's life; to know God is to be in harmony and sympathy with His will. Religion is life after the type which has been perfectly exemplified in Jesus Christ. Neither a barren intellectualism nor a dreamy and impractical mysticism in religion could ever develop along the lines of teaching which St. John has marked out.

The mind of the apostle seems to see all things in their principles and essential ideas. This peculiarity of thought gives rise to a species of realism. All the forces of goodness are comprehended by him under some general idea, like *light* or *truth*; while all the forms of evil are summed up as *darkness* or *falsehood*. The whole course of history illustrates the conflict of these opposing powers or principles. The character and actions of men correspond to the principle which sways their lives. The apostle's habit of thinking in antitheses is an illustration of this peculiarity of his mind. Accordingly, his writings are characterised by a species of dualism—not the metaphysical dualism which makes evil an essential and eternal principle of the universe, but a moral dualism which, as a matter of fact, finds illustration in human history from the beginning of the race.

St. John conceives of religion as consisting in the immediate, personal relation of the soul to God or to Christ. It begins with an impartation from God. To be born of God means to receive from Him a communication of spiritual life, whereby the soul is more and more transformed into Christ-likeness. To the mind of St. John, religion signifies the progressive attainment by man of his true type or idea—not, indeed, by efforts of his own, but by his appropriation and use of that Divine power which God freely bestows upon him. The Christ-like life is the true life, and the only life.

Another peculiarity of the Johannine theology is seen in the way in which the apostle blends the religious life in this world with the eternal, spiritual order. By his conception of eternal life as a present possession, he unites this world with the world to come. To his mind the spiritual life is the heavenly life already begun. St. John has given us a purely ethical and spiritual conception of religion. The whole emphasis is laid upon the inner quality of the life. Nothing is said of institutions—not even of the Church. No emphasis is laid upon sacraments.

What elements of Christian doctrine is the Johannine theology especially adapted to supply? The Johannine type of thought has been far less influential than the Pauline type of thought in shaping the great dogmatic systems. The Christian doctrine of God has usually been developed from the legal conceptions of His nature and relations to men which underlie St. Paul's Jewish forms of thought. The dominant idea of St. John concerning God

as light and love has not been the characteristic or central conception of the prevailing historic theologies. Christian thought concerning God has continued through all the centuries predominantly Jewish, taking its colour from the terms of St. Paul's polemic against Judaism, and growing more and more stereotyped in that form through the influence upon it of the severe logic of certain great minds of a strongly legal cast—such as Augustine, Calvin, and Grotius. The soteriology of the Church has been characteristically Pauline. But without detracting from the great truths which Paulinism has contributed to Christian thought, there is much reason to desire that the spiritual mysticism of St. John should acquire its legitimate influence in theology and life. The tendency of an increased appreciation and application of St. John's method of thought must be to lead to a better adjustment of doctrine and life.

Theology is theory; religion is life. Theology purports to be the intellectual equivalent—which must always be approximate only—of the realities of the religious life. The true method of thought respecting theology and religion is not to separate them, but to assign to each of them its true function. There can be no religion without theology—unless religion can be divorced from thought—since theology begins with the simplest efforts of the mind to construe its religious ideas and experiences, and to interpret their significance, ground, and end. But for this very reason theology is secondary.

The apostle John has placed in the foreground of all his teaching the realities of the religious life—God as love, man as needy—fellowship with God through likeness to Christ, as eternal life. He seems willing to trust the religious life to give direction and shape to religious thought. He thus places at the centre what by its very nature is central (*George B. Stevens*).

Estimate of St. John's Peculiarity.

We shall not, we think, be mistaken if we say that the profound necessity which filled the soul of John from the first was the desire for the infinite. The name of *mal de l'infini* has been given to that nameless desire which consumes sensitive and dreamy natures until they have found the object of their aspirations. From St. John's writings we can perceive that this was the necessity of his nature which opened his soul to the gospel. It is not without significance that the word "life" is the dominant one in his writings. In life we see the natural vanity and emptiness of finite existence, saturated with the richness of infinite being. It is the heart of the creature quenching its thirst with peace, with holiness, with strength, by immediate access to the supreme fountain-head. It is man lifted to God, and God living in man. This seems to have been the ideal of John from his youth.

A contemplative and reserved nature is the soil in which poetical or philosophical geniuses grow. The philosophic faculty, which consists in the power of ascending rapidly from each individual fact to its general principle, is evidently the child of contemplation; and the poetical mind, which is quick at discovering

at once the concrete image in which the abstract idea may be clothed and embodied, presupposes the habit of surrendering oneself to a meditative reverie, of which the only aim is to fix more firmly in the mind the idea with which it is preoccupied, and to give it a body. The first of these faculties comes out most conspicuously in his gospel; the second in the great Biblical poem, the Apocalypse. In the former every manifestation of the person of Jesus is contemplated from the point of view of its eternal and spiritual significance. Reading this narrative with attention, we feel the Divine Word throbbing in every fibre of the flesh of the Son of man. Each of His miracles is like the illumination of some one of the aspects of His dignity as the Son. The various effects which are seen produced around His path, however accidental they may seem at first sight, are all referred to their distinctive principles, whether in the direction of good or evil; and beyond the secondary causes we can always discover, in the two domains of light and darkness, the higher cause, God or Satan.

From this we understand why it is that his polemics against heresy, which are naturally not found in the gospel, but which develop themselves in the first epistle, should be summary and affirmative, not analytical or discursive—thundering, such as to befit the son of thunder.

[The points of view of the four great apostles may be thus presented.] Entering upon the course along which the Church was to travel, Peter fixes his eyes upon the proposed goal—that is, the promised glory; this was the point of attraction, the originating spring of the movement. James simply sketches the route—holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. Paul points out the entrance into that route—personal justification, reconciliation with God, the alone Good, apart from communion with whom man can do nothing. John, lastly, contemplates this whole work under the form of a Divine life communicated to man through the medium of righteousness, with the view to producing holiness, and in prospect of the final glory (*Godet*).

CHAPTER I.

THE FELLOWSHIPS OF THE HOLY LIFE.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

VERSES 1 to 4 are introductory, and may be compared with the prologue of the gospel by St. John. The subject of the epistle is "the Word who is the life"; and its purpose "to complete the joy of the disciples in the Lord." *Westcott* thinks that St. John uses the plural *we* as speaking in the name of the apostolic body, of which he was the last surviving representative.

Ver. 1. **From the beginning.**—*ἀπ' ἀρχῆς*, neuter. This is usually taken as referring to the existence of Christ from before the Incarnation. "The Being which existed from the beginning." But it may be the simple assertion of the apostle's competency to deal with a matter of which he had information at first hand (compare Luke i. 2, 3). "From the beginning" may mean the beginning of Christ's ministry. St. John was one of the first disciples, and the one who enjoyed closest intimacy with our Lord. The first-hand knowledge of the apostles gave them their special authority. **Of the Word of life.**—Concerning Him; related to Him. Genitive with preposition *περί*. The *Word* which is the *Life*. The Word of God, and Life of men. Or, the Word which was in a life. That human life which Christ lived *was* His word, His message.

Ver. 2. **Manifested.**—A word has to be *spoken* if it is to be apprehended by others. A word that is a *life* must *appear* in mortal scenes if it is to be understood, and to exert a gracious influence. *Manifested* is made apprehensible by human senses. **Shew unto you.**—Better, *declare*. **Eternal life.**—Divine, spiritual life. The word "eternal" indicates a class or kind of life. The time figure in it only helps to the realising of quality or kind. R.V. "the life, the eternal life." "St. John tells us over and over again that eternal life can be possessed in this world."

Ver. 3. **Fellowship.**—*κοινωνίαν*, participation, communion in privilege and blessing. The special theme of the epistle; the ruling word. "It generally denotes the fellowship of persons with persons in one and the same object, always common to all, and sometimes whole to each" (*Canon Evans*). "This is St. John's conception of the Church: each member of it possesses the Son, and through Him the Father; and this common possession gives communion with all other members as well as with the Divine Persons" (*Plummer*). **Our fellowship.**—*Our* is emphatic. It is precisely that fellowship the apostles enjoyed which they wanted the whole Church to share. **His Son.**—Greek, "the Son of Him."

Ver. 4. **Your joy.**—Better, "our joy may be fulfilled" (compare Phil. ii. 2; John xv. 11, xvii. 13). "That serene happiness which is the result of conscious union with God and good men, of conscious possession of eternal life, and which raises us above pain, and sorrow, and remorse."

Ver. 5.—The first part of the epistle begins here. It is directed against the Gnostic teaching, that to a man of enlightenment all conduct is morally indifferent. In every age there have been those who claimed an interest in Christ while living in sin. St. John does not address sinners generally, but distinctly those who made Christian profession, but fell short of it through misapprehensions and self-delusions. **God is light.**—This is not merely the absolute fact concerning Him. It is the precise fact which Jesus Christ declared to be the first of truths. "We have heard [it] of Him." Christianity is founded on the Divine *holiness*. Light is the sensible figure of rectitude, moral purity.

Ver. 6. **Walk in darkness.**—Either to hide what we do not wish to be seen, or in self-indulgent ways which are symbolised by darkness. *Plummer* says, "Some Gnostics taught, not merely that to the illuminated all conduct was alike, but that to reach the highest form of illumination men must experience every kind of action, however abominable, in order to work themselves free from the powers that rule the world." See 2 Cor. vi. 14. **We lie.**—Either in self-deception, or in wilfully deceiving others.

Ver. 7. **One with another.**—Fellowship with Christ, which involves fellowship with the Father, and surely brings us into fellowship with all who have the same fellowship. **Blood of Jesus Christ.**—Omit *Christ*. The *blood* is as truly a figure as the *light*. "The blood is the

life." But it is the surrendered life. There was no *actual* blood shed in the dying of the Lord Jesus that can in any sense be applied for cleansing. There is no general declaration of the universal efficacy of Christ's blood to cleanse all sin. The reference here is strictly limited to professing Christians. **Cleanseth.**—Present tense. The cleansing work is continually going on. **Us.**—Precisely those who are in saving relations with Christ, but fall into sins of frailty (Heb. ix. 14; Rev. vii. 14). It is not the pardon of sin, but purification from sin, which is here associated with the "blood of Christ."

Ver. 8. **Deceive ourselves.**—Lead ourselves astray.

Ver. 9. **And to cleanse us.**—Notice that He Himself is said to do what, in ver. 7, His *blood* is said to do. The later expression helps to explain the earlier.

Note on ver. 7 by Eric Haupt.—"Blood and life are in the Scripture equivalent terms: where that is, there is this; for the life is in the blood, according to the language of the Old Testament. Thus then the καθαρισμὸς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας is possible only in consequence of the blood of Christ entering into our life as a new principle of life. There is absolutely no Christian sanctification imaginable which does not take place through the blood—that is, through the Redeemer's power of life working its effects and ruling within us."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—4.

The Testimony of the Apostles.—It may be that, strictly speaking, the term "apostle" means no more than "sent one," and is sufficiently represented by our term "missionary"; but it is evident that it was used in the early Church both in a general and in a special sense. It is applied to missionaries, such as Barnabas and Silas; but it is also the precise designation of twelve men who had been in daily personal relations with the Lord Jesus. The commonly received idea of an apostle was indicated by St. Peter in the upper room, when he suggested the filling up of the place of Judas: "Of the men therefore which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day that He was received up from us, of these must one become a witness with us of His resurrection." And St. Paul rests his claim to apostleship on the fact that he also had actually seen the Lord Jesus, and had received direct communications from Him (Gal. i. 11-17). The writer of this epistle does not give his name; probably there was no occasion for him to do so, as he was well known in the Churches, and the harmony between the letter and his teachings was at once and fully recognised. He claims attention to his message not on purely personal grounds, but on the ground of his accurate and first-hand knowledge of the things of which he wrote.

I. **The competency of the apostles for their witness and their work.**—That witness concerned the earthly life of the Lord Jesus; that work was declaring the *impressions* which their direct relation to Christ's earthly life had made upon them. They were to tell men that their personal experience had convinced them that Jesus was Messiah, Son of God, God manifest. 1. They were competent through their *sense*-apprehensions of Christ. Most of the twelve, and John was one, had known Christ, in personal discipleship, from the very beginning of His ministry, and all had been with Him in daily intercourse for three years up to the sudden and violent close of His life. They had the testimony of their senses, of their sight, and of their hearing. They watched their Lord in His varied daily labours, and nightly devotions and restings. They knew every characteristic expression of His face, and movement of His hand. They listened to His mutiplied teachings, and knew well the differing tones of His voice. They had been with Him in the many moods of His feeling—now tender and sympathetic, now intense and earnest, now mystical and dreamy, now reproachful and severe. If ever men knew a fellow-man through sense-apprehensions of him, those twelve men, and St. John more especially, must have known Christ

And that sensible intimacy gave a peculiar force, exactness, and persuasiveness to their testimony. They spoke at first hand, and not what they had been told, but what they had themselves seen, and heard, and handled of the Word of life. In these days the verification of everything by actual experiment, or sense-knowledge, is demanded; and it is not sufficiently considered that precisely this personal, direct, sensible apprehension of Christ the apostles had, and that on our own conditions of acceptable testimony we are bound to receive theirs. They saw with their own eyes, they beheld, their hands handled. We do not deal fairly by the apostles if we either suspect or reject their testimony. But their relation to Christ brought them—2. Competency through their *mental* apprehensions. What they thus daily saw and heard became food for *thought*. Thought fitted the new facts and impressions to previously possessed knowledge, and the apostles gradually made up their minds that Jesus was the promised Messiah, though by no means the *sort* of Messiah that they expected. That *otherwiseness* of Jesus became increasingly impressed upon them as they came to know Him better; and gradually they came to fill with their deeper meanings the names, "Son of man," and "Son of God." Those thinkings were genuine, unbiassed, the natural workings of the sensible impressions made upon them in their daily intercourse with Jesus. It should be clearly seen that there were, in the apostles' days, no doctrines concerning the person of Christ which could possibly bias their minds. They thought simply and genuinely. Indeed, their thinking even surprised themselves. And when they testified that Jesus is the Son of God, they uttered the personal conviction to which twelve men had been led by thinking on a series of facts of which they had direct and exact knowledge. Surely if any men ever were competent to make a testimony about anything, these apostles were concerning the person and mission of the Lord Jesus. Yet this is not all. 3. These apostles had an unusual and direct spiritual illumination, and the competency to render their testimony which belongs to men Divinely inspired. It is well for us to see first their natural competency as men, and then their supernatural competency as inspired men. Their Lord promised them the power of the Holy Ghost for giving their witness concerning Him, and the sign that the promise was fulfilled is found in the baptism of the Day of Pentecost. In all the records of history, can any man, or any body of men, be found who were more efficiently and satisfactorily fitted for their life-work than the apostles of the Lord Jesus? St. John has a perfect right to claim competency in dealing with the Christian truth.

II. **The one truth which is the centre of the apostolic testimony.**—Perhaps most evidently of St. John's testimony, but as really of St. Peter's and St. Paul's. It was the double truth of the Deity and humanity of Christ. "Declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." It is not with sufficient distinctness seen that the double nature of Christ is no more capable of proof, satisfactory to the human intellect, than is the being of God. The apostles reached the conviction of the Divine humanity of Jesus through their close personal intercourse with Him; it was the impression made upon them by what they saw, and heard, and felt. And the conviction of the Divine-humanness of Christ never comes to any man in any other way. Let any man now come into close personal relations with Christ, let him *feel* the impression which Christ always makes, when He is permitted to come fully into the sphere of a man's thought, and heart, and life, and he will surely be drawn to the "Man Christ Jesus," and will bow before Him, saying, "My Lord, and my God." "St. John gives a twofold utterance concerning the object of his publication: that He in His nature is eternal, and therefore Divine; and also that He descended into the domain of human, yea sensible, experience, and thus became manifest, so that He became known in a perfectly assured manner."

"The eternal life is described as something enfolded in Christ and inseparable from His person" (*Eric Haupt*).

III. **St. John has one great aim in rendering his witness.**—"That ye also may have fellowship with us" (ver. 3). Fellowship with us in our fellowship, he means. "Yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ." What appears to be in St. John's mind is this—the spiritual apprehension of Christ which he had gained, had not only brought him closely near to Christ, but had also brought him closely near to God, nearer than anything else ever had, or ever could. Realising the Sonship of Christ glorified God to him; it revealed him as the eternal Father. Realising *his* sonship in Christ brought him the delightful realisation that God was *his* Father, and so put him in closest and dearest relation and fellowship with Him. And then St. John exclaims, that he writes this epistle because he wants his friends to share his joy. He would have them know Christ as he knew Him; then they would share with him the fellowship of the Father and the Son, and their joy would be full. St John's testimony as an apostle then is fully trustworthy; he was competent to the work of giving it. It concerned the possibility of fellowship with God. It declares that he enjoyed the fellowship. It explains how he came into it. He had personal intercourse with Christ. He learned the mystery in Christ. Through His humanity he discovered His Divinity. He saw Him to be the Son of God. The vision drew him close; and when close to, for communing with the Son, he found he was communing with the Father. St. John's was the typical experience of believers: they apprehend the "Man Christ Jesus"; they find in Him "the Son of God with power"; and the vision of the Son brings the vision of the Father—the fellowship of the Son, the fellowship of the Father.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 1. *The Power of Personal Experience.*—There are some things that can only be effectively known through a personal experience of them, or in relation to them. That must be so, because some things cannot be apprehended by the intellect alone; they must be known through *feeling*. The highest truths of religion cannot be grasped save by intellect fused in feeling. It has often been pointed out that a man cannot know *evil* save by doing it, and feeling its results. And it is certain that no man ever can know Christ until he has come into personal relations with Him, and has experienced what He, by His grace, can do in and for him. St. John claims to have that peculiar power to declare truth, and to persuade others, which comes from knowledge gained through experience. It is a power which, in one sense, no Christian teacher can have had since the apostles' days; yet it is a power which, in another sense, every Christian teacher may have, and must have for efficiency, in every age.

Ver. 2. *Manifesting the Eternal Life.*—Manifesting means bringing an unseen, spiritual thing into the realm of the human senses, so that it may be apprehensible to beings who are placed under the limitations of *sense-conditions*. But manifesting does not mean that the spiritual changes its nature, and becomes material. What is meant is, that the spiritual accommodates itself to our sense-conditions, by using and showing itself by means of a medium which makes due appeal to the senses. Christ is a spiritual and unseen Being, but He is *manifest* to us through the medium of the "Man Christ Jesus," who is the material veil through which we can discern the spiritual Being that He is. He, *the life*, the spiritual, the eternal life, was manifested, and we have

seen it. Man can only think with words which are really figures apprehensible by the senses. So it is said, God, who cannot be seen, is seen, is "manifest in the flesh." We see God in the human Christ.

Ver. 3. *Fellowship with the Father.*—There are three stages in what we may call the higher Christian life. 1. Baptism with the Spirit. 2. Conscious vital union with the Son. 3. Fellowship with the Father. Coming to God, reconciliation with God, loving God, praying to God, hoping to be with Him, are all blessed, but they are not *fellowship.*

I. **The access to God which is possible to the believer is that of close and abiding fellowship.**—The sense of the Divine reality and nearness was a constant experience in Eden. But sin altered all that. It cut us off from God. Our Lord came to bring us back to God. The possibility of human fellowship with God is shown—1. *In the earthly life of Christ.* To Him the spiritual world was always near. 2. *By God's presence and relationship.* 3. *By the plain statements of His word.*

II. **This fellowship is the supreme Christian blessedness.**—1. Think of it as unspeakable honour. 2. As permanent satisfaction. 3. As progressive holiness.

III. **This supreme blessedness is to be enjoyed in Christ.**—1. In Christ we have the right of approach to God. 2. In Christ we have the personal purity needed for Divine communion. 3. In Christ we have the spirit that ever rises to the Father. 4. In Christ we have the welcome with God that He has.—*Charles New.*

The Mystery in Christ.—The following profound thoughts struggle for expression in these four opening verses. There is a Being who has existed with God the Father from all eternity: He is the Father's Son; He is also the expression of the Father's nature and will. He has been manifested in space and time; and of that manifestation I and others have had personal knowledge; by the united evidence of our senses we have been convinced of its reality. In revealing to us the Divine nature He becomes to us life, eternal life. With the declaration of all this in our hands as the gospel, we come to you in this epistle, that you may unite with us in our great possession, and that our joy in the Lord may be made complete.—*A. Plummer, D.D.*

Our Fellowship in Christ.—"Fellowship" is the key-word of this epistle. St. John's prevailing idea was that Christianity brings men together in brotherly helpfulness by bringing them to God. He, in effect, says: "You and I may be in fellowship with one another, if we are in fellowship with the Father and the Son. I would help you to get and to keep in that fellowship." When sin entered into the world, it spoiled man's sonship to God, and his brotherhood with his fellow-man. He who truly loves God will be sure to love his brother. He who loses the love of God will be sure to find his human fellowships breaking up. God made fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters; but the result of the Fall was a sort of separation between Adam and Eve, the parents, in the first generation, and between Cain and Abel, the brothers, in the second. Gustave Doré represents Adam and Eve, when they have sought the thick shade of the trees to hide away from God. They are sitting apart from each other, self-conscious and ashamed, and a huge, hideously shaped trunk of a great forest tree is between them, a fitting symbol of that dreadful thing, self-will, and self-indulgence, which had come between them and God, and therefore separated them from each other. The evil grew with the generations. Men built cities to protect themselves from each other. Brothers made much of "mine" and "thine"; each man lived for himself; and then man's ruin was complete. Christ came to restore the fellowship

of man with man, and He could only accomplish this work by doing another work first—restoring man's fellowship with God. Christianity brings men together as nothing else does. And it attains its end by restoring God's family idea for man. Parents and children must help each other. Brothers and sisters must help each other. Each member of the family must live for the other members: "By love serving one another." No redeemed man "liveth unto himself." He is redeemed from that very thing. Dr. George Macdonald has a very queer and dreamy character, who thinks and imagines most weird, and quaint, but suggestive things. In one of his dreams he seemed to be in heaven, and it was just like earth. There were shops, and buying and selling were going on, only there was *no money*. Everybody simply did his best to serve his neighbour for nothing. The wholesale house was served by the manufacturer, and the retail tradesman was served by the wholesale house, and the private customer was served by the retail tradesman. The Christ-spirit was triumphant. There was no need for money to buy service, for it was freely given. It is a striking thing that, in the first enthusiasm of the early Church, an effort should have been made to realise this fellowship of mutual service. They kept together, and lived on a common fund.

I. **Our fellowship in Christ is based on relationship.**—It is "with the Father." To have fellowship with the Father clearly means that we are, in all the joy of the home life, fully entering into all the privileges of our relationships. Where a father dwells is a home; by his presence it becomes a home. He keeps all the members together. When he is gone, the family is scattered. We may take these earthly associations, and let them help us to apprehend our relationships with God. We are, as Christians, not a separated, scattered family; we are all with our Father. We are at home. We are sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, in the actual relations of family life; and our Father is with us. This is no mere doctrine or sentiment. "Because we are sons, He hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts," and in the home life we are to be as brotherly and helpful to one another as Christ is to us.

II. **Our fellowship in Christ is based on character.**—When our attention is directed to it, we can plainly see that the joy and unity of an earthly family, in an earthly home, depend on *goodness*. Not on love, or on numbers, or on abilities; but on character. The one thing that breaks up homes is lost characters, not calamity, not sickness. We can neither have fellowship with the Father, nor with one another, unless we have fellowship with the Son, oneness with Him in thought, feeling, spirit, purpose, character. God smiled out of heaven upon His Son, and said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"; and it was Christ's character with which He was pleased. Christ bade His disciples "follow Him," and He did not merely mean, "Attend upon Me; come after Me; step in My footprints": He meant, "Be like Me; do like Me; have My mind; breathe My spirit; work My work; be changed into My image; be the Father's sons, acceptable to Him, even as I am." St. John says, "Fellowship with the Son," to remind us that the spirit of sonship is the essential to fellowship with the Father, and with each other. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God perfects praise. A story is told of an old coloured woman in Michigan, known as Sojourner Truth. Some one had spread a report that she had left the fellowship of the Church, and joined the spiritualists. One of the village pastors went to question her. "Who tole you dat, chile?" said the old lady. "It is so stated in the newspapers, and I wanted to know if you *had* joined the spiritualists." Straightening herself up to her full height, and bringing her arm down like a blacksmith, the old woman exclaimed, "Bress your soul, chile, *dahs nothen to jine!* You may

tell all the people that 'ole Sojourner' 'long to Jesus these many years. She's as true to de Master as de anvil to de hammer. I nebber give up my faith in Jesus for anything else." The fellowship of Jesus carried with it the fellowship of the Church.

Ver. 4. *Joy in Higher Truth.*—A.V. "That *your* joy may be full." R.V. "That *our* joy may be full." We may perhaps combine the two, and read, "That the joy may be full, yours as well as ours." It is in the fuller and worthier apprehension of the person of Christ that St. John expects to increase his own joy, and the joy of those to whom he writes. It is often pointed out that the increase of knowledge is usually an increase of *sorrow*. It is apt to shake down confidence in long-cherished beliefs, to separate us from the friendships and associations of early life, and to bewilder us with ever-gathering and ever-thickening mysteries. And if that is in any sense true of increasing knowledge of the material world, and of the mental and social life of humanity, it is certainly much more true of those things which concern man's spiritual nature, and man's relations as a spiritual being to God the great Spirit. Apprehension of the higher philosophical, theological, and spiritual truths brings with it a great strain on feeling, which may even be called "sorrow." Yet this is only one side of the truth. Advance into all higher truth is attended by delightful excitement, surprise, and joy. Positive pleasure, and pleasure of the purest and best kind, is felt by those who learn more, deeper, and surprising things concerning the phenomena of life upon the earth, and concerning the marvels of the heavens. A Newton, a Faraday, a Darwin, have positive joy, a fulness of joy, in the higher truth of fact in regard to the material world which they attain day by day. And the same may be said of the masters in philosophy, and in history, and in art. But a curious idea has come to be established in relation to religion. It is boldly assumed that a man's religious joy will be in proportion to the simplicity—the childishness—of his grasp of the eternal verities that centre in the person and manifestation of Jesus Christ. Men are deterred from growing into the higher truth by fear of losing their joy. St. John unfolds the higher mysteries of Christ, *in order that*, thus, men's joy might be filled up full.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 5—10.

The Conditions and Privileges of Christian Fellowship.—St. John had entered into, and was enjoying, the "fellowship of the Father and the Son." That fellowship he wanted the disciples to enjoy as fully as he did. He would therefore have them worthily estimate its privileges, and understand the conditions of its maintenance. And since he has in mind the particular character of the mischievous influences to which the disciples were then exposed, his instructions exclusively bear relation to their correction. It was then being freely taught that to the spiritual man all conduct is morally indifferent—nothing that he does, in the bodily and material spheres, is regarded as sin, nothing breaks up his fellowship with God. It is manifest that such teaching strikes at the very root of Christianity, which is, essentially, the recovery of men to *righteousness*, and that not a sentimental or mystical righteousness, but a real, present, practical righteousness, which must include knowing how to "possess the vessel of the body in sanctification and honour."

I. **The absolute condition of fellowship is perfect righteousness.**—This is indicated in the term "light," the most pure and unsullied of all things,

and in the strongly marked contrast between light and darkness, each of which absolutely opposes and excludes the other; there can be no conceivable alliance or accommodation between them. God is represented by light. That only can be in fellowship with Him which also is light. Man's self-indulgences belong to darkness, and make darkness. The light can have nothing whatever to do with them, except to clear the darkness away. There can be no *fellowship* where the strongest opposition is excited. Illustration may be taken from the Ormuzd and Ahriman of the Zoroastrian reform. The two powers are actively and persistently opposed. It is well for us to face this truth as openly as possible. The full relation to God is only possible to perfect beings—perfect as He is perfect. It was possible to the one righteous Man, the sinless Christ. It is possible, fully, to no other man.

II. **Perfect righteousness is a condition unattainable by us.**—It is to any creature who is only a creature. But *that* perfect righteousness which is possible to a creature is not possible to *us* creatures, because our race has to carry the burden and disability of sin. We can never have fellowship with God on the absolute condition of being light as He is light, perfect as He is perfect. St. John brings out clearly this distinction—though we cannot be actually *light*, as God is, we can *will* to be light, and we can *make effort* to be what we will to be. We can "walk in darkness," or "walk in light," the term "walk" implying will and effort. And in these two things may be found the only righteousness attainable by any creature while in limited, earthly conditions, and affected by the disabilities of a sin-biassed, bodily nature. The will is the man; it is the spiritual being acting; and the man is in the light, if his will is firmly set for righteousness. Then the man is kin with God, and can have fellowship with Him.

III. **Christian imperfections have to be taken into account, but they need not spoil fellowship, if they are rightly dealt with.**—St. John's teaching cannot be rightly apprehended unless the distinction between the sin of the regenerate man and of the unregenerate man is fully recognised. The unregenerate man sins as the expression of a will that is *set* against God. The regenerate man sins by persuasion of bodily frailty, or at most by the temporary *bending aside* of his will. Christians do sin. Their sin would disturb fellowship. But the liability to sin has been taken into merciful account, and due provision has been made for it. 1. It is expected that the Christian man will, by confession, clear himself of all suspicion of having *his will* in his sin. 2. Then God will entirely forgive the sin, and remove it as a hindrance to fellowship. 3. And even more, God will, in the power of the blood of Christ, cleanse the Christian from all the evil influences of his sin, and help him to recover the power which he must have temporarily lost, or he could not have yielded to the sin. The *condition* of fellowship with the Light is our being, at least in central purpose, also light. The *privilege* is a gracious provision for the imperfections which, at the best, attach to the human light.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 5. *God is light.*—Here is the essence of the Christian theology, the truth about the Deity as opposed to all the imperfect conceptions of Him which had embittered the minds of the wise. To the heathen, Deity had meant angry, malevolent beings, worshipped best by the secrecy of outrageous vice; to the Greeks and Romans, forces of nature transformed into superhuman men and women, powerful and impure; to the philo-

sophers, an abstraction either moral or physical; to the Gnostics it was a remote idea, equal and contending forces of good and evil, recognisable only through less and less perfect deputies. All this St. John, summing up what the Old Testament and our Lord had said about the almighty Father, sweeps away in one simple declaration of truth. Light was God's garment in Ps. civ. 2; to Ezekiel (chap. i. 1), the appearance of the likeness of God was brightness; to Habakkuk (chap. iii. 8), His brightness was as the light; Christ had called the sons of God children of the light (John xii. 36), and announced Himself as the Light of the world (John viii. 12); in the Hebrews (chap. i. 3), Christ was the refracted ray of the Father's glory, "the express image of His person"; to James, the Almighty was the Father of all lights (chap. i. 17); to Paul, He dwells "in the light that no man can approach unto" (1 Tim. vi. 16); to Peter, the Christian state is an admission "into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. ii. 9). These ideas John comprehends. God is light. Light physical, because (1) it was He who called everything first out of darkness, and (2) from Him proceed all health and perfection. Light intellectual, because (1) He is the source of all wisdom and knowledge, and (2) in His mind exist the ideals after which all things strive. Light moral, because (1) His perfection shows that the difference between good and evil is not merely a question of degree, but fundamental and final; and (2) the life of Christ had exhibited that contrast sharply, once for all.—*W. M. Sinclair, D.D.*

Ver. 6. *On being true to Ourselves.*—A man should take care that his professions and his conduct are kept in the strictest harmony. If he says he abides in Christ, his walk must evidently be a Christly walk. That may be urged as a plain and manifest duty (1) for Christ's sake, whom we are bound to honour, if we bear His name; (2) for other people's sake, since they cannot but misunderstand Christ, and so fail to realise His saving and sanctifying power, if we who bear His name misrepresent Him. But the point now to be impressed is, that there must be harmony between profession and conduct, because it is absolutely essential to a man's moral dignity and stability that he should be consciously true to himself. Let a man permit a conscious opposition between profession and life, and the man *debases himself.* Fail to be true to self, fail to be consciously at harmony with yourself, and you not only become slave to man, but slave to the devil, who finds his chance when the supreme concern for moral consistency is destroyed in a man's soul.

Walk in Darkness.—"The word 'walk' expresses not merely action, but habitual action. A life in moral darkness can have no more communion with God, than a life in a coal-pit can have communion with the sun. For 'what communion hath light with darkness?' (2 Cor. vi. 4). Light can be shut out, but it cannot be shut in. Some Gnostics taught, not merely that to the illuminated all conduct was alike, but that to reach the highest form of illumination men must experience every kind of action, however abominable, in order to work themselves free from the powers that rule the world." "If the light is the Divine, then the darkness is the undivine, or that which is opposed to God—that is, the nature turned away from God, and not directed to Him. Hence the σκοτία, darkness, coincides with the New Testament idea of the κόσμος; it is the principle which animates and governs the κόσμος, and which comes in it into outward exhibition and form."

Perils of Self-deceit.—These may come from a man's particular disposition; or from the influence—bias—of public opinion; or from special times of unrestrainable passion; or

from distinctly false and corrupting teachings.

Vers. 6, 7. *Walking in Darkness or in Light.*—Darkness represents the *self*-sphere. Light represents the *God*-sphere. God is kin with everything clean, good, kind. Self spoils even good things by throwing upon them the shadow of its own darkness. Darkness, both in poetry and religion, is the symbol of evil. The figure may not come very effectively to those of us who have been brought up in Christian surroundings and associations; but we have to think of the moral atmosphere of pagan cities in the time when St. John lived. Their darkness is faithfully revealed in the first chapter of the epistle to the Romans. Or we may try to realise what is the depraved moral life of certain sections of our great cities. Or perhaps we can gain a better impression, and find a sharper contrast, if we think of the moral atmosphere of a heathen city, such as are to be found all over India, where immorality is actually made a portion of worship, an agency of religion, and the whole range of thought, and tone of human relations, are dark indeed: men walk in darkness. And there, in the very midst of all the impurities, move to and fro the few men and women who are regenerate in Christ Jesus. They walk in the light. Lives morally sweet; thought and feeling sensitively delicate and pure. They breathe the light; they live with God, who is light. St. John urges that no other than such walking in the light can be befitting to those who have been made light in the Lord. Men were deceiving themselves then with the idea that they could keep their soul-relations to the light, and yield to dark bodily indulgences. All material things, they said, were evil; and since they were in material bodies, they could not help being in a dark sphere, and it did not much matter how dark it was, if only they kept their souls in the light. But this is precisely what men never can do, and they wholly deceive themselves if they think they can. Where the body goes the soul will really go, whatever the outward seeming may be. And where the soul goes it will never rest content unless it has the body with it.

Ver. 7. *The Christian's Walk in Light and Love.*—I am to speak to you of that bond of love which binds soul to soul in binding all to God; of that walk of light which assimilates us to Him who *is* light; and of the union which identifies these, in connecting them both with the purifying work of Christ. 1. The apostle declares himself commissioned to proclaim a "message" of transcendent importance, calculated to consummate the joy of all the believing people of God. It is this, "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." 2. This revelation of the Divine excellency is directly connected with the mystical communion of which he speaks. The one is, in some measure, the condition on which the other is suspended. This light, with which God Himself is identified, becomes also the element in which His elect children breathe and move. 3. The apostle contemplates the Church of the sanctified walking together under the radiance of a common light, which streams from the presence of God, and which, involving them all, assimilates them all. What is that fellowship, and what that light, which are declared to involve each the other? First, we must resolve each into its proper origin, to contemplate each in its proper aspect. The apostle speaks of a fellowship essentially Christian; and to it none other than the Christian believer is competent. It is "fellowship *with us*," because it is "fellowship with the Father and the Son." The communion is essentially Divine; it exists in and through God alone; it is of each with each, because of all with Him. If you would learn its properties and characteristics, you must seek them in their fountain, where the human soul is alone with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. We are "to

walk in the light, *as* He is in the light." We are to design from God Himself. We are to look straight to Him. The remove from the original may be infinite, but it is only one remove. "As He is, so are we in this world." The walk in light is the earthly image of the supernal light; the "fellowship one with another" resolves into "the fellowship with the Father and the Son." The Christian verity has taught us how to contemplate God. We are to regard that wondrous Essence which caused and sustains the universe as parting into three streams from one eternal Source, which (stooping to our capacities, relationships, and language) it has styled the Father, Son, and Spirit. Of what these Persons are, in their own nature, we cannot know; of what they are in relation to us, we can. Our fellowship is with the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. If, then, our fellowship with Deity be distinguished into separate communions, each having its own grounds and offices of intercourse, and if this threefold communion be inseparably interwoven with the "walk of light" which imitates a God who "is light," we may naturally expect that that celestial lustre which represents the whole Godhead shall itself be separable into significancies, in some measure corresponding to the Divine Personages whom the Godhead embraces. Thus shall our threefold communion be met and answered by a threefold "light." The significancies of that Divine light seem resolvable into three cardinal excellencies—holiness, happiness, and knowledge. God the Father, God of all righteousness; God the Son, the God of all happiness; God the Spirit, God of all truth: or God the Father, imputer of our righteousness; God the Son, victorious obtainer of our happiness; God the Spirit, liberal bestower of our wisdom. To live within the verge of the Divine illumination is to hold communion with the essential excellencies of the triune God. If the fellowship of the Three in One thus answer to the threefold light in which they dwell, *how*, specially, does it correspond to *each*? If the Father be eminently the light of holiness, and our accepter as a holy people in Jesus, he who walks in *that* light communes with Him by the link of holiness, by the cordial adoption of that "righteousness of God which is witnessed by the law and the prophets," by profound submission to that will which is the executive, that reason which is in itself the legislative council, of the universe. If the Son be eminently the light of celestial peace and its dispenser, we commune with Him as dwellers in *that* light,—by *trust* boundless and unfeigned in that victor who, having once and for ever foiled His adversary in the deadly struggle of Gethsemane and Calvary, will never forsake the Church He redeemed; by *gratitude* for blessings undeserved; by *joy* for blessings assured and everlasting; by that sterner task of which another apostle speaks, the fellowship of *His sufferings*, being made conformable to His death (Phil. iii. 10). If in the Spirit we worship the light of eternal truth and its revealer, *when* are we found in *that* light, and when blending in mystic union with Him who abides there, but when with a sanctified reason we apply our whole mind to receive and understand His revelations, when, raising at His call the faculties which He alone can furnish with fitting objects, we issue gladly forth from the world of shadows, and meet Him, where He awaits us, in the world of immutable reality? The earthly career of *light* involves the whole Christian life, as directed to each member of the ever-blessed Trinity. And the whole communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as well as the mutual communion of the brethren in Christ, is comprehended in that single word *love*.—*W. Archer Butler, M.A.*

The Power of Christ's Blood.—Blood is a figure for the surrender of life. In giving to God the blood of animals the worshipper gave to God the animal's life. In shedding His blood

Jesus gave *His life* to God as a sacrifice of perfect obedience and perfect trust. Because He thus gave His life to God, and was fully accepted, Jesus has the power to do three things: 1. To forgive sins that we have committed. 2. To cleanse us from the bad consequences and influences of the sins. 3. To keep us from committing them again; for even when we are made clean, we have to walk and work amid temptations and evils. So we need that He who forgives and cleanses should also defend and keep.

A Double Fellowship and a Single Condition.

I. **A fellowship with Christ—with God in Christ.**—1. To be a Christian is to enter into gracious relations with Christ. 2. To keep a Christian is to maintain those gracious relations. Sometimes the prominent aspect in the fellowship is *service*, sometimes it is *friendship*. "Henceforth I call you not servants, but I have called you friends."

II. **A fellowship one with another in Christ.**—The fellowship of—1. A common love. 2. A common duty. 3. A common experience. 4. A common worship.

III. **Both forms of fellowship depend on one condition:** "Walking in the light"—that is, walking according to the will of God, who is the light, as contrasted with walking in the darkness of our self-will and self-pleasing. Our spheres of fellowship may vary, but the condition of maintaining fellowship is absolute and unchangeable.

The Fellowship of Believers.—Temptation in all ages to dissociate holiness from profession.

I. The fellowship of believers with each other depends on their **individual fellowship with the Father and the Son.** First, fellowship with God. That brings Christian union. The degree of the union depends on the fellowship with God. No *force* will make a Christian life or Christian union. Nourishment of inward spirit will tell on Christian living and Christian fellowship.

II. Fellowship depends wholly **on mutual sympathy.** Light cannot have fellowship with darkness. God is light—the symbol of purity, moral perfectness. A man in sympathy with darkness cannot be in fellowship with the light. That differs from saying a man who *sins* cannot be in fellowship. A man may be in full sympathy with light, and be struggling after it, and yet be often overcome with evil. Fellowship depends on the heart being set on the light. And the bond of fellowship with one another is the common love of, and seeking after, the light.

III. For the imperfectness of human walking in the light **a gracious remedy is provided.** "The blood of Jesus cleanseth us." It covers the evil, and it cleanses it away. The blood stands for the living power of Jesus.

The Condition of Christian Fellowship.—Some texts are difficult to expound because of our familiarity with them. We too readily assume that we understand them, and we therefore resist all fresh and independent inquiry concerning them. There are two ways of treating Scripture texts: 1. We may let the words suggest thought. That way is suited to private meditation. But there is always this danger—we may come to think that our thoughts are as authoritative as the Scripture words. 2. We may inquire what the words actually mean. That way is especially suited to public ministries. It is strange that St. John the loving should be the most controversial of the New Testament writers. But that is the fact which we may assert in view both of his gospel and his epistles. The false teachings of his day concerning the person of Christ are familiar: the false teachings concerning the Christian life

are not so well known. There have been Antinomian teachings in every age. They took two forms in St. John's days. It was said (1) that the enlightened could be indifferent to moral distinctions; and (2) that the enlightened ought to have complete knowledge of evil through personal experience of it. We can understand how such teachings affected the Christians when they came to be translated into the common thought. This St. John deals with in the beginning of his epistle. Christianity is inseparable from holiness; it can live in no other atmosphere. As he sees Christianity it is *fellowship*; and we cannot wonder at his taking this view when we remember how close was his own personal fellowship with Christ. To him personal religion was fellowship with Christ, and what it involved, even fellowship with the Father, and fellowship with the other sons. St. John caught the spirit of Christ's great prayer, which he alone records. St. John begins his epistle by asserting his competency. He had intimately known everything relating to Christ from the beginning. What then is Christ's primary message? This—God is light. Light is the material symbol of goodness, righteousness. Christ, who manifests God, manifests Him as light. No man sees Christ aright unless the sight makes him feel, as he never felt before, the holiness of God. His point in the text is this—there is a condition on which fellowship depends, and there is a privilege which maintained fellowship secures.

I. **The condition on which fellowship depends.**—"If we walk in the light." Illustrate by the conditions of human associations. There must be common interests, and a common spirit. So in religion, there can be no fellowship if some walk in light, and some walk in darkness. How expressive of moral difference the terms "light" and "darkness" are! The Father of light walks in light. The "Light of the world" walked in light. Those named after the "Light of the world" must walk in light.

II. **The privilege which maintained fellowship secures.**—"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth *us* from all sin." The "blood of Jesus" is a figure, just as "God is light" is a figure. It is not here the blood as the ground of forgiveness, but the blood as the *power*, or *agency*, in *cleansing*. St. John addresses persons who *are* forgiven, and restored to the Divine family. But here is a difficulty. Blood does *not cleanse*. Nobody ever heard of its use in such a way. (The only approach to the idea is the old use of bullocks' blood in refining sugar.) St. John was a Jew. To him the *blood* was the *life*. Put the word *life* for the word *blood*, and say, "The life of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." That partly gives St. John's meaning; but it is not altogether satisfactory. When *blood* stands for *life*, it always means blood *shed*, life *surrendered*. Apprehend this, and the apostle's meaning becomes clear. The "blood of Jesus" stands for that power to cleanse which Jesus has gained by surrendering His life. It is called His blood because it has come to Him through His blood-shedding. St. John's idea is this—keep fellowship by walking in the light, and you will surely find that there is a privilege belonging to that fellowship. It is this—one member of the fellowship is an ever-active power, working at the cleansing away of everything that can possibly break or spoil the fellowship. The symbol of our Lord's continuous work in the fellowship was given in the "upper room," when He washed the disciples' feet, and dealt, for cleansing, with their sins of frailty. It was a fellowship of the "clean." He kept it by removing the soilings from the feet. And is not this precisely the provision that we need? The sincere ones are frail. Frailty is provided for in the fellowship, if only we keep sincere. In family life, so long as the fellowship is preserved, the frailties can be easily and wisely dealt with. How does the

living Lord Jesus cleanse? Through the discipline of life-experience, which He uses and sanctifies. And He comes to us with great persuasions that He can cleanse—persuasions from His blood-shedding, from His entrusted powers as Mediator, from His adaptation through a human experience. And Christ in our life, cleansing us from our Christian frailties, is our inspiration to the cleansing of ourselves. There is what *we* only can do. There is what *He* only can do.

Close with St. Peter's drawing up his feet away from the cleansing Christ. He was imperilling his fellowship.

The Lord's Supper an Expression of Fellowship.—One of the great words of St. John's epistles is *fellowship*. The thought is beautifully presented here. The early disciples came into *contact* with the Lord, seeing, hearing, and touching Him. Their communion and fellowship were immediate and personal, and their contact with other disciples who had not seen the Lord was also immediate and personal, and so by declaring to them what they had seen and heard they introduced them to the fellowship of the Lord Himself. Christian history forms a chain of many links; and as we trace back link after link, till we come to Him from whom all hang in dependence, we feel the unity, the solidarity, of the Christian brotherhood and testimony. The Lord's Supper is the *expression of this visible fellowship*. 1. Immediately connected with the existing body of disciples. 2. Links every new commemoration to all the preceding. 3. And so unites every body of disciples to the Lord.—*Anon.*

The Limitations of Christian Sin.—Much confusion of thought is occasioned by persisting in keeping to one definition of sin, as if it could always be just the same thing. It is the "transgression of the law"; but it is something else besides. It is the expression of self-will. It is even a natural consequence of human frailty. And it will be manifest that the character of sin necessarily changes when a man is renewed in will and motive by the regenerating grace in Christ Jesus. He becomes a *new man*; and if he gives full and befitting expression to his new life, he cannot sin. To sin *with the will* is the act of the unregenerate man; and if a Christian ever sins with his will, he, at least for the time, falls back upon the conditions of his unregenerate life. It needs to be firmly stated that the Christian, as such, cannot determinedly sin *with his will*. He may sin through frailty, or because led astray, and deceived by temptation; his will may be even forced aside for a time; but he comes to himself again when the force is withdrawn. He sins a child's sins who is in the full joy of home life and love.

Ver. 8. *The Peril of Christian Self-deception.*—"Where there is even only a trace of life, and of the Divine fulness, this must immediately manifest sin to be sin" (*Eric Haupt*).

I. **The denial of sin.**—1. Some claim an absolute exemption from sin. 2. Some say they have no sin, by claiming a relative exemption from it.

II. **The consequence of this denial.**—For us to deny our sin is to deny—1. Indisputable facts. 2. The infallible testimony of the word of God. 3. The moral propriety of the scheme of redemption.

III. **The confession of sin.**—"If we confess," etc.

IV. **The consequence of such confession.**—1. Forgiveness. 2. Sanctification.—*Dr. Clark.*

Sinful Tendencies of Christians.—The preceding words had reminded St. John that even mature Christians, though certainly not "walking in darkness," yet have sinful tendencies in themselves: sensuous impulses, non-spiritual inclinations, lack of self-knowledge, a lowered standard, principles and views borrowed partly from the world, wavering of will, and hence graver faults. Not to admit this would be to mislead ourselves, and in us the

power and energy of light, searching the very corners of the heart, would not be working.—*W. M. Sinclair, D.D.*

Self-delusion as to our State before God.—It is among the most potent of the energies of sin, that it leads astray by blinding, and blinds by leading astray. There is an inherent and inevitable efficacy in sin to diffuse darkness, and to make us in love with the darkness it diffuses. In the judgment God will unravel all the tangled mesh of our excuses, and flash upon us the tremendous conviction, that we are lost only because we *would* be lost, that in every several instance of temptation the sin lay with us as the situation with God.

I. **The imagination of our own sinlessness is an inward lie.**—It has been questioned whether the apostle included in this affirmation the highest degrees of Christian attainment; but Wesley made the theological question of Christian perfectibility of far more *practical* importance than it ever deserved. Whatever may be the measure of sanctification which God bestows upon His children in this world, we can scarcely conceive its highest state unaccompanied with a longing for a state yet higher, clearly conceived, and sought with a personal consciousness (so far) of imperfection, and an ardent desire to still escape that remainder of earthliness that embarrasses the ascent. In fact, the belief of Christian perfectibility seems inapplicable to *individual practice* from the very nature of Christian holiness. Were a perfect man to exist, he himself would be the last to know it, for the highest stage of advancement is the lowest descent in *humility*. The spiritual life, as a progressive life, involves a progressively increasing knowledge of God; and as it approaches the Source of all holiness, the spirit of man must appreciate far more accurately the force of the *contrast* between itself and its mighty Model. In truth, it is only fervent and exalted piety that can really feel how immeasurably far it is from perfect holiness. Whatever be the doctrine of Christian perfectibility collected out of the writings of St. John, it certainly can have but little relation to the earthly saint's estimate of *his own* piety. It is not, however, of these "perfect" ones that we now speak, but rather of those whose cold hearts and neglectful lives utter the bold denial of a sinlessness which the lips dare not deny. Adequately to enumerate the causes of this lamentable blindness to pressing and palpable evil would be impossible. The particular causes of the delusion will vary with every variety of individual character. Every temptation that occupies, and by occupying excludes all other occupants, may claim its share in the perpetuation of this melancholy ignorance. We can only speak of some of the general principles on which the delusion rests.

II. **The sources of this lamentable ignorance of our personal state with God.**—Something is due to the governing agency of Satan, the "ruler of the darkness of this world." He who deceives that he may destroy, stupefies that he may deceive. The cunning of the serpent alone can reach the master-subtlety of making the soul of man do his work by being its own unpitying enemy, and traitor, and cheat: it is only the "father of lies" that thus can make the wretched heart a liar to itself. The first and darkest of his works on earth is the original and inherited corruption of the human soul itself. It is ignorant of sin, just because it is naturally sinful. Faint, frail, and disordered from the first, how should it easily suspect its own disease? One chief object of the gospel history, as applied by the Spirit of God, is to humble and yet animate us by a portraiture of moral excellence which, as observation cannot furnish, so assuredly nature will never spontaneously imagine. We cannot know our degradation, we cannot struggle, or even wish, to rise, if we have never been led to conceive the possibility of a state higher than our own. For the mournful unconsciousness of our personal

depravity, have we not a powerful cause in *that depravity itself*? But no human being can be seen in the state of nature alone. Repeated acts are become principles of action, and every man is the creature of his own past life. If degraded nature is silent in denouncing sin, what shall she be when doubly and trebly indurated by *habit*. We know not ourselves as sinners, because from infancy we have breathed the atmosphere of sin. A man lives in the frigid formalism of external religion, or in the habitual neglect of God, until it seems almost impossible to separate the habit from life itself: to live at all is to live *thus*. The terrible power of irreligion, become thus habitual, to blind men to the momentous peril of their daily state, is above all evinced in this: that every form of exhortation or appeal is weak to break the lethargy; yet not at all from any unbelief of the facts or doctrines stated, but from an obstinate refusal or inability to imagine that they can have the remotest reference to the hearer himself. And this operation of habit is a universal law. Is not there something in the frame and condition of the world that is fitted to assist this melancholy work of deception? The blind man does not conceive of light, neither does the godless spirit conceive of God. But even supposing the organ to be restored, were he placed in a *world of darkness*, he would be as far as ever from imagining the true nature of the light he could not witness. Society moulds us. As men copy themselves by force of *habit*, they copy others by force of *example*. Mankind in crowds and communities tends to uniformity. We cherish and confirm the dream that "we have no sin," because all the world is sinful as ourselves. The power of this universality of sin around us to paralyse the sensibility of conscience is augmented by the influence of rank and fashion. So servile a copyist of evil is man, that vice, the darkest and most degrading, seems to lose its name and nature when thus authenticated by the passport of rank. To this must be added the tendency of pleasure itself, or of indolence, to prolong this deception, and our natural impatience of the pain of self-disapproval. There are two ways of escaping an angry conscience—by ceasing from the evil that provokes it, or by resolutely refusing to hear its voice, which soon amounts to silencing it for ever.—*W. Archer Butler, M.A.*

Ver. 9. *God keeping Conditions.*—"He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." It is true to the nature of things that a father should forgive and restore his erring child, if that child penitently confesses his sin. And in putting Himself into the figure of a father, God puts Himself into fatherly conditions; and those conditions we may be quite sure that He will keep. He must, for He cannot be other than just to Himself, and faithful to us. "Just," in this verse, has nothing to do with the conditions on which, as a moral governor, God's justice is satisfied. "Just" here is a feature of the Divine character. In the same sense as that in which we speak of a man as a just man, we may speak of God as a just God. A just man will keep his engagements, strictly, honourably, fully. He will try to shirk nothing. And this security we have in thinking of the just God. If He has made a covenant, He will keep every one of its terms. If He has given promises, He will fulfil every one of them to the letter. If He has said He will forgive and cleanse His penitent children, forgive and cleanse He certainly will.

Confession a Sign of Right-mindedness.—Confession as an act standing by itself has but little value. Its importance lies in the condition of mind and feeling which it represents and indicates. What is the mood towards sin of the man who confesses? (Of course, the supposition is that the confession is sincere.) Plainly, it is a different mood to that which he was

in when he committed the sin, or when he kept in the hardened frame which allowed of his committing the sin. Plainly, too, he is in an humble mood of mind, and even distressed that he should have been led astray. And plainly, also, he now wants all the wrong taken away, and the broken relations fully restored. But these are *right* moods. The man has become right-minded. The proper spirit of the son has come back to the man; and in that fact is found a sufficient basis for full forgiveness and acceptance, and a gracious cleansing work.

Cases of Confession.—Three cases are conceivable: A man may have nothing to confess; a man may be in a mood that he will not confess; and a man may want to confess. What do each of these reveal concerning the man?

Confessing our Sins.—What is it to confess our sins? It is to tell them out to God. It is true God knows them already far better than we do ourselves. To Him all hearts are open, and from Him no secrets are hid. So when He bids us confess our sins, it is not that *He* may know them better, but that *we* may know them better, and feel them more deeply. And so it is plain that to confess our sins must mean much more than the mere telling them out to God. For this would be nothing at all, without self-examination, and godly sorrow, and humbling of the heart, and penitence, and prayer, and holy resolves, and amendment of life. Observe the twofold blessing promised: (1) the forgiveness of sin; (2) the cleansing from all unrighteousness. These are simply the two great wants of man with regard to sin: pardon for the past; cleansing for the future; or, in other words, the gifts of justification and sanctification. By the one (justification) we are accepted by God, who blots out our sins, and counts us as righteous for Christ's sake, without our really being so; by the other (sanctification) we are really made righteous in ourselves, God's Holy Spirit working in us, so that we conquer the power of sin, and grow in grace and holiness.—*W. Walsham How, D.D.*

Forgiving must go with Cleansing.—Could it possibly suffice for God to forgive? That may be tried in both the public spheres of justice, and in the private spheres of the family. The failure of public justice is seen in that it can do two things only. It can acquit, and it can punish, but it cannot *cleanse*. Consequently public justice as a *civil* power is effective, and as a *moral* power is helpless. The success of family dealing with wrong-doing is seen in the fact that a father can never satisfy himself with any act of forgiveness, because his supreme concern is the moral well-being of his child, whom he would deliver from the influence and power of his wilfulness, whom he must get cleansed from all his unrighteousness.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Ver. 5. "*God is light.*"—Light is beautiful; it is gladdening to the eye and to the heart; it flies toward us like God's angel from the skies; but light of itself is not enough. It were a poor thing for this earth if the sun gave it only light. Soon it would be clothed in the whiteness of universal snow, relieved only by an azure of glacial ice, and in the cold, clear, dazzling glare the life of ocean and continent would die. The earth would not cease to be—it would roll on, a fair and beauteous star among the worlds; but no life would stir in its cold magnificence, no voice would break the stillness of its icy solitudes—it would roll on, a splendid sepulchre, through the skies. Light of itself is not enough. Life wants something more than light. No life can be matured apart from warmth. Were God only light, we might be spotless as snow, chaste as crystals, beautiful as blocks of ice; but the best and highest things in our natures would die—there would be no warmth of friendship in our grasp, no pity flowing in tears of sympathy from our eyes, no sacrificing love in our hearts; our minds

might become glorious, but our hearts would be empty and dead. And, therefore, inasmuch as a tender, sympathetic heart is higher than a mere scholastic mind, inasmuch as sacrifice is profounder than wisdom, and the cross sublimer than philosophy, insomuch is the knowledge that "God is love" better to us than the knowledge that "God is light."—*Henry Wonnacott.*

A Legend of the Light.—There is a Rabbinical legend that, when light issued from under the throne of God, the prince of darkness asked the Creator wherefore He had brought light into existence. God answered that it was in order that he might be driven back to his abode of darkness. The evil one asked that he might see that; and, entering the stream of light, he saw across time and the world, and beheld the face of Messiah. Then he fell upon his face and cried, "This is He who shall lay low in ruin me, and all the inhabitants of hell."

Ver. 7. *Walking in the Light.*—The planet Venus teaches an important lesson to the followers of Christ, viz. that the earth was never yet known to come between her and the sun. Whence the languor and the spiritual declensions, the darkness and the soul distresses, of many a child of light? Come they not very frequently from giving way to earthly cares, earthly joys, and earthly pursuits? We let these things shut out the sun. No wonder that we move heavily and walk in the dark while we cultivate that friendship with this world which is enmity with God. But if, on the contrary, our affections are set on things above—if our treasure and our hearts are with Christ in heaven—we shall probably "walk in the light," and enjoy an abiding perception of interest in His precious blood which cleanseth from all sin.—*Salter.*

Luther and the Evil One.—There is a legend of Luther that, during a serious illness, the evil one seemed to enter his sick-room, and, looking at him with a triumphant smile, unrolled a vast roll which he carried in his arms. As the fiend threw one end of it on the floor, and it unwound itself with the impetus he had given it, Luther's eyes were fixed on it, and to his consternation he read there the long and fearful record of his own sins, clearly and distinctly enumerated. That stout heart quailed before that ghastly roll. Suddenly it flashed into his mind that there was one thing not written there. He said aloud, "One thing you have forgotten: the rest is all true; but one thing you have forgotten—'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.'" As he said this, the "accuser of the brethren," and his heavy roll of "lamentation, and mourning, and woe," disappeared together.

Purity through Christ's cleansing.—See these pure white clouds that stretch in ranks, like rolling waves, across the canopy of heaven in the still, deep noon of a summer day! Row after row they lie in the light, opening their bosoms to the blaze of a noontide sun; and they are all fair; "they are without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." Who are these that stand, as it were, around the throne of God in white clothing, and whence came they? These are they that have come from various places on the surface of the earth and sea,—some from the briny ocean, and some from miry land; some from yellow, overflowing rivers, and some from cool, crystal springs; some from stagnant pools in distant, lonely deserts, and some from the slimy bed of the Thames, or the Clyde, where living beings can scarcely breathe on the banks. All are alike welcome to these heavens, and all are, in their resurrection state, equally pure. May I—spiritually distant and unclean—may I rise, like these snow-white clouds, from earth to heaven, and take my place, without challenge, among the stainless witnesses who stand around the Redeemer's throne? I may—not because my stains are few, but because "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin." I may—not because my sins are small, but because my Saviour is great.—*W. Arnot.*

CHAPTER II.

PROVISION FOR THE SINNING OF BELIEVERS.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

FIRMLY does St. John declare that the Christian should not sin, and must not sin. But he clearly recognises that Christians do actually sin through frailty. And he presents the consolation which is found in the gracious provision for dealing with Christian sins, both in their relation to God, and in their effects upon Christians themselves.

Ver. 1. **Little children.**—Suitable to such an aged and honoured teacher, such a father in Christ, as St. John. It is seen that it expresses his affectionate interest in them; it is

not so often seen that it expresses also his sense of the immaturity, and consequent peril, of the disciples. **These things.**—Both those things which he has said, and those things which he is about to say. St. John's one all-ruling anxiety was, to help Christians *not to sin.* His epistle can only be understood when that passion for righteousness in Christian professors is fully apprehended. This may be taken as St. John's key-note, "He that *doeth* righteousness is righteous, even as He [the Divine and human Son] is righteous." **Advocate.**—Same word as St. John uses in his gospel. It is there translated "Comforter" (John xiv. 16, 25, xv. 26, xvi. 7). One who is ready to plead for us; and One who has peculiar power, and right, to plead. See our word "Intercessor." **With the Father.**—*With* is literally *towards.* But the point is, that the Advocate is *always* with the Father, and His help is therefore *always available.* The name for God, Father, is intended to remind us that the apostle is not here speaking about anybody and everybody's sins against God, but precisely about the sins of God's *children,* which are sins against their spiritual and Divine *Father.* **The righteous.**—Or, the perfect, ideal, model Son, who never sins, but does always the things that please the Father. His standing before the Father as the righteous Son is the perpetual plea for merciful dealing with those who want to be such sons as He is, and cannot be by reason of their bodily and human frailties. Righteous sonship is the best of pleas with the righteous Father.

Ver. 2. **Propitiation.**—Better, "And He Himself is a propitiation." It is not something He does that propitiates, but He Himself standing ever before the Father as the righteous Son propitiates the Father, and, as it were, secures His kindly dealing with the other sons, who are working towards, but come short of, the same righteous sonship. **Our sins.**—Distinctly *ours*; the reference is precisely to those who are born of God into the spiritual sonship. **Of the whole world.**—This St. John adds, lest his precise setting of truth should be supposed to exclude the general truth of Christ's redemptive work for the world. St. Paul presents a similar double truth when he writes of Christ as "the Saviour of all men, *specially of those who believe.*"

Ver. 3. **Know Him.**—Compare chap. i. 6, "have fellowship with Him." Better, know Him in the special spiritual relations of Divine Fatherhood. Sin disturbs the knowledge, and breaks the relations. Perfect son-like obedience, such as Christ's, keeps for us the knowledge of the Father, and the close relations with the Father, which Christ has. **His commandments.**—Some think Christ's are meant; but it is better to understand the Father's commandments apprehended through Christ.

Ver. 4. **A liar.**—We do not now use this word, save under special stress. Such a man as St. John speaks of we should call "self-deceived," a man giving way to self-delusions. The two things, the new life unto righteousness, in Christ, and the old life unto iniquity, in self, can never by any possibility be made to go together. The one kills the other.

Ver. 5. **Love of God perfected.**—Because the one thing that love is ever striving to do is, inspire obedience; and it only accomplishes its end when it secures obedience.

Ver. 6. **Abideth in Him.**—The truth is applied to the Christian *life* which has already been applied to the Christian profession. A Christ-like obedience is the one all-sufficing test of reality and sincerity. **Walk.**—Compare "conversation," terms that compass the whole Christian life and relations.

Ver. 8. **New commandment.**—St. John seems to refer to his demand of love to the brethren, as the satisfactory sign of heart-obedience, son-like obedience to the Father. And this was new in the sense that no previous religious or ethical system had made such a demand. The common law of humanity is, "Serve yourself first, and then serve others, if you can." The Divine law of humanity is, "Serve others first, and serve yourselves only when you are quite free of all brotherly obligations." **Darkness is past.**—Which hid from men the Fatherhood of God, and prevented them from realising their brotherhood. **True light.**—It is the light of Christ's ideal sonship and brotherliness.

Ver. 9. **Hateth.**—This is a word which has changed its meaning since the A.V. was made. The Bible word means, "love less"; "put second"; "show indifference to." The Christian hates self when he puts self second. The worldly man hates his brother when he puts him after self.

Ver. 10. **None occasion of stumbling.**—*I.e.* the self-seeking principle is constantly putting men in peril of doing wrong and unjust things to their brethren. The love which "seeketh not her own" never urges any man to do anything that is unkind or unworthy. "Love to the brethren is a proof of uninterrupted abiding in the light, and of a blameless course in the way of righteousness." St. John evidently had to deal with teachers who urged that love to Christ was enough to secure all the Christian blessings. He counteracts such mischievous teachings, by thus firmly asserting that love to Christ is absolutely inseparable from love to the brethren; there cannot possibly be the one without the other.

Vers. 12-17 indicate the things which the disciples must *not* love, if they would walk in the light, and be sons with the "Only Begotten."

Ver. 12. **Sins are forgiven.**—The reception of Divine forgiveness is our virtual pledge that we will not again sin. "The forgiveness of sins is the first condition of Christian

morals." **His name's sake.**—His name is Son. The basis of forgiveness is the offering to God the Father of a perfect sonship—the sonship of a man tested in a human life and death. St. John has not in mind what we mean by "for the sake of His atonement."

Ver. 13. **Fathers.**—The older men among the disciples; regarded as having a prolonged personal experience. **Young men.**—Who have gained something like a personal hold of Divine things, but are in danger of being over-confident and over-positive. They have gained first victories over evil, and are in danger of being unduly proud of their success. In each case St. John recognises a certain maturity, in which there is hope, together with a certain immaturity, which exposes disciples to the powers of evil and temptation.

Ver. 15. **The world.**—Compare our Lord's words, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." By the "world" we may understand "that moral order which is antagonistic to God." Or we may keep in the line of St. John's thought and say, "It is all that sphere in which only self-interests are allowed to rule." St. John personifies the self, and calls it the "evil one," the "wicked one." **Things in the world.**—The love of pleasure, money, glory. See Jas. i. 27, iv. 4. Philo taught, "It is impossible for love to the world to coexist with love to God."

Ver. 16. **Lust of the flesh.**—The genitive after ἐπιθυμία is usually subjective. The lusts which have their agents in the flesh and in the eyes. Lust is desire that is not being held in wise and safe control. "The habit of a mind engrossed by sensual gratifications." **Pride of life.**—This is well expressed by the term "braggadocio of life"; "wanton ostentation in gratifying the desires of sense and sight" (Jas. iv. 16). "All living up to a supposed social position, instead of as the responsible steward of undeserved bounties, is hereby condemned."

Ver. 17. **Abideth for ever.**—Because God is on the side of goodness, and there are no forces which can effectively stop it, or destroy it. In the nature of things evil is temporary, and good is permanent. *For ever* means, "unto the age to come."

Ver. 18. **Last time.**—R.V. "last hour"; probably it should be "*a* last hour." The period after Christ's coming in the flesh, however long it may prove to be, is regarded as the "last time." If the apostles did expect a visible return of their Lord in their day, it is quite clear that the facts of Christian history have proved that the expectation was founded on misapprehension. The Christian dispensation is the last until there is another. **Antichrist shall come.**—Cometh. It was the common belief of Christians that some individual antichrist would appear before our Lord's second coming; and a similar notion is entertained by those who look for the second coming now. Antichrist is any person, or any thing, that opposes the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the earth. So there have been antichrists in every age, and there are antichrists to-day. *Opposition to Christ* is the essential idea of the word; but it seems specially to refer to those who claimed that they themselves were christs—such as Barcochba. There is, however, a distinction to be drawn between *false christs* and *antichrists*. Compare Barcochba and Cerinthus. **Are there many antichrists.**—Better, "have there arisen." St. John would check the disposition to fix the association of antichrist to any *one person*. And his caution is greatly needed in our day. What we require to see more clearly is, that antichrist *may* be a person, but it need not be: it may be a sentiment, a teaching, a doctrine, a social influence.

Ver. 19. **Went out from us.**—The most dangerous form of antichrist is the heretical teaching of those who have belonged to Christ's Church. They so easily make rival parties and sects. Perhaps St. John had in mind the Gnostics, who were recruited from members of the Christian Church. The Church in every age has been composed of nominal members and real members. Its peril has always lain in the uncertainty of the response of its *nominal* members to surrounding doubtful and evil influences. Those who have the "unction from the Holy One," the Divine indwelling Spirit, are defended from the attractions of sectarianism and heresy. Their spiritual life, kept in health by the Holy Spirit, throws off all attacks of disease, as bodies do in which there is strong vitality.

Ver. 20. **Unction from the Holy One.**—Or, "anointing." The association of the Spirit coming to a man, when anointed to a Divine office, may be seen in the case of the kings Saul and David. Each believer, in the early Church, received an anointing from God in the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. **Know all things.**—Led by the Spirit into all truth, and therefore guarded against the attractions of error. Some read, "you all know"—that is, "you are in possession of the true knowledge" (John xvi. 13).

Ver. 22. **A liar.**—Better, "*the* liar." **The Christ.**—*I.e.* the Messiah. **Denieth the Father and the Son.**—Three tests by which the spirit of antichrist may be recognised. It will be found to oppose the Messiahship, and the Sonship of Jesus, and the Fatherhood of God. These tests of orthodoxy are seldom applied now, or indeed regarded as sufficient.

Ver. 23.—The second part of this verse the R.V. preserves, and reads thus, "he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also."

Ver. 24.—Omit "therefore." **Which ye have heard.**—Concerning Christ, and Christ's truth, on the authority of His apostles. **Remain . . . continue.**—In both cases prefer the

word "abide." *Dr. Plummer* paraphrases thus, "Let the truths which were first taught you have a home in your hearts: if these have a home in you, ye also shall have a home in the Son and in the Father." Developments of the primary truths there must be, but all developments, adjustments, and adaptations must be in the strictest harmony with the primary truths.

Ver. 27. **Any man teach you.**—That is, any man who claims personal authority to teach, and does not speak by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. **Anointing.**—Which implies and involves that the Spirit is in you, leading you into all truth. St. John seems to suggest that the Spirit dwelling in the disciple will always make him sensitive to the recognition of the Spirit in his teacher. As he has shown that the new Divine life will keep us from *sin*, so now he shows that it will keep us from *error*.

Ver. 28. **Ashamed before Him.**—Better, "shamed away from Him"; or, "shrink in shame from Him."

Ver. 29. **Ye know.**—Better, "know ye." **Doeth righteousness.**—Note the emphasis on *doing*: see chap. iii. 7. "A sober, righteous, and godly life is the fruit, and consequently the proof, of spiritual birth—the token by which the sons of God by adoption and grace are distinguished from other men."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—6.

The Remedy for Christian Sin a Reason for not sinning.—It has already been shown that fellowship with God must depend on our being kin with Him in *light*, which represents purity, righteousness, sinlessness. But that condition is practically unattainable by any who are placed in creaturely limitations, and in existing human conditions. Even when a man is right in will, and purpose, and endeavour, the fact remains that he falls into sins of frailty, and even sins of temporary self-willedness. If St. John had failed to recognise this fact, and had made unqualified the demand for perfection, as the absolutely essential condition of fellowship, he would have made the Christian life a hopeless and impossible thing: men would despairingly have said, "It is high; I cannot attain unto it; and I shall not try." On the other hand, it was necessary to present the remedy for Christian frailty and sin in such a way that men could not presume upon it, and continue in sin that grace may abound. In the first two verses of this chapter, the remedy for Christian sin, which was partly stated in chap. i. 7, is further unfolded; or we may more correctly say, the one truth is seen from other sides, and other points of view.

I. **The provision made for Christian sin.**—This is stated in very precise terms. We have an *Advocate*, and His advocacy is a *propitiation*. 1. We have an Advocate—*παράκλητον ἔχομεν*. The word is "Paraclete," which we directly associate with the Holy Ghost, but which our Lord taught us could properly be applied to Himself; for He said, "I will send you another Comforter." Would we then understand the Paraclete's work with the Father, we must compare it with the Paraclete's work in us. It is clearly a persuading, influencing work—a pleading of our cause, a securing of gracious and kindly dealing with our Christian sins. The figure in the word, both as applied to Christ and to the Spirit, is the pleading of a man's cause at a court of justice, and the securing of an acquittal, or at least of a modification of sentence. But we may come much nearer to the case St. John presents if we fit his illustration to *family* life. One of the children in the family love may be led astray, and may do some wrong thing, which greatly grieves the parent, and for the time properly puts even the beloved child out of pleasant relations. What can be done to restore relations? Plainly enough, it is possible for another son—maybe the eldest son—to take all the burden upon himself, and resolve to do everything possible to set things right again. His first work will be with the erring brother; he must get him to see his sin, confess it, and be sorry for it. Then when he has got his brother restored to his right, child-like mind, he can be his "advocate with

the father," and can present such reasons as may persuade and propitiate him, and make it right for him to receive the erring son back again into the family life. And so Christ, our elder brother, undertakes to deal with His brothers' sins. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sins." When they are recovered to right-willedness, right-heartedness, He can become their "Advocate with the Father," and with all becoming and effective persuasions propitiate Him, and secure their return to full son-like standing and relations. 2. The advocacy of Christ is a "propitiation." There is no indication whatever that St. John had in his mind the sacrificial work of Christ. His mind was evidently occupied with the *person* of Christ, with the *living* person of Christ—not with something He had done, but with something He *was doing*, the actual present relation in which He stands to believers, His present spiritual intercession and advocacy. A father ought to show his indignation and grief at the wrong-doing of his child. He ought to punish the child by putting him for a time out of pleasant relations. And such a father, in such a becoming state of mind, can be appeased, can be properly propitiated, if he can be assured that the erring child has been brought to penitence and confession, and, in the recovered spirit of son-like obedience and trust, longs to have loving relations restored. It should clearly be seen, that the pleading of the Advocate is with the *Father*, whose son has gone astray; and the propitiation is such as can be offered to a grieved Father. It is twofold: 1. It is the personal acceptableness of the Advocate (Christ the *righteous*) which gives power to His plea. 2. It is the work which the Advocate has done in the erring son which gives the Father full and sufficient ground for restoring him to favour.

II. **The persuasion against Christian sinning.**—"These things I write unto you, that ye may not sin." To unfold such full and gracious provisions for a case of Christian sin might be used wrongly, and Christian people might become indifferent and careless. Because recovery was so easy and so complete, they might presume, and think lightly of frailties and stumblings. St. John reminds us how utterly wrong, and how unworthy, such a misuse of his teachings was. The grace in recovery should be a persuasion to the most watchful endeavour *not* to make occasion for the grace. There should be the most resolute effort to keep our Father's commandments, and never grieve Him, or put ourselves out of loving relations with Him. And we shall be sure to keep right if only we will "walk even as Christ walked" (ver. 6). There is the Sonship that is always well-pleasing to the Father; and the very grace of that Son towards His frail brothers should be a constant persuasion to them to try, more and more, to live like Him, and think like Him, and keep all pleasant relations with the Father, even as He does, because He ever walks in the light, which is kin with the Father, who *is light*.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 1. *St. John's Little Children.*—"My little children"—τεκνία. It is quite certain that St. John does not write his epistle to, or here address, mere children. His term is used figuratively. St. John may have in mind—1. That the believers to whom he wrote were but in the young, early stages of Christian life, knowledge, and experience. 2. Or the term may only indicate his affectionate consideration for them, as an aged father in Christ. But it is more probable—3. That the term was carefully chosen by St. John, in order to suggest to them that *family* associations would best explain to them his teachings. They would understand him if they thought of themselves as children—good children, but frail—and needing

much training and discipline; and if they thought of God as their Father, who would surely be grieved at His children's wayward ways. "St. John's conception of the Church is that of a family, in which all are children of God and brethren one of another, but in which also some who are elders stand in a parental relation to the younger brethren." See chaps. ii. 12, 28, iii. 18, iv. 4, v. 21.

Children's Sin.—"That *ye* may not sin." *Ye*, the children of the family, to which St. John, and the Lord Jesus, both belonged. The distinction between the sin of those in family relations, and the sin of those outside family relations, needs to be very carefully drawn. For one thing, the sins of the members of the family are wholly dealt with *within the family*. They are never taken to a court of justice. They can be quite effectively dealt with by the father, and the other children. For another thing, the idea of punishment for vindication of authority goes into the background in connection with a *child's* sin; and the recovery of the child, and the discipline of the child through the way in which he is recovered, become the prominent and all-important things.

Our Lord as Paraclete.—παράκλητος πρὸς τὸν πατέρα. The Lord is our Paraclete—that is, not as it were *with* the Father, for the accusative must have its rights, as meaning over against or towards the Father. His advocacy turns towards the Father, and has to do with Him; while, on the other hand, He is, according to the gospel, ἐν ἡμῖν, our Paraclete, inasmuch as He stands by the side of the Christian, in all his conflict with the world and himself, as his Counsellor, and Advocate, and Helper. But as towards God, who is light, and a righteous Judge, the Lord can be regarded as a merciful Mediator only under a twofold presupposition: 1. He must Himself be well-pleasing to God through His moral qualification. 2. He must represent a cause which may commend itself to God as the righteous One. The first element is in our verse made prominent by the predicate δίκαιος; the second verse brings out the second element. The two united cannot be more tersely and precisely expressed than in the words of Calvin: "Justum et propitiationem vocat Christum; utroque præditum esse oportet; ut *munus personamque* advocati sustineat, quis enim peccator nobis Dei gratiam conciliet?" Hence it is not to be overlooked that we read, not παράκλητον δίκαιον ἔχομεν, but παράκλητον ἔχομεν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον. The former statement would indeed mean that His agency as a Paraclete was a righteous one, that He is righteous in His proper function as a Paraclete—as Beda expresses it, "Patronus justus caussas injustas non accipit"; but it is not until the second verse that that element comes out. The order in the apostle's own words gives prominence first to the righteousness of the person—by reason of which He is fitted generally, as over against God, to assume the part of a Mediator. —*Eric Haupt.*

Christ in Heaven.—St. John's message can be put into a sentence. Fellowship with the Father may be enjoyed, but only by those who "walk in the light." The full idea of the Christian life includes likeness to God in two essential things—light and love. In the perfect Christian life there is no sin, for there is no self-will. Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. But that ideal is seldom, if ever, actually attained. As a fact, Christian people do sin. Unless the statement is most carefully qualified, it is false for any man to say that he has reached conscious freedom from sin. The word of God provides for the fact of Christian sin. They who are clean every whit still need to wash their feet. There are two ways of

dealing with the fact: 1. We may assume that sin is a necessity to the Christian life, and that there need be no grave anxiety about it. But to deal with it in this way would be to put our Christian life in peril, and nourish presumption. Dress a child in pure garments, and it will make all the difference in his conduct if he is expected to soil them. The child and the Christian should fully understand that they *need not* soil their garments: they may walk in white. But in case they unwittingly do, provision is duly made. 2. We may too greatly despond on account of Christian sins, and this we do when we wrongly estimate the provision which has been made for them. Despondency is a serious evil; it plucks away the joy and enterprise of Christian life. It is quite one thing for us to have some stains gather on the white garment of our acceptance, and quite another to strip our white garment off. Keeping it on, there is a most full and blessed provision made for the stains: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Deliverance from both forms of mistake lies in a proper apprehension of the truth gathering round Christ in heaven.

I. **Christ in heaven—in general, His work in the heavenly places.**—The mediatorial work of Christ is represented as having three stages, when viewed historically. A stage of *preparation* running through some four thousand years, in which man was permitted to exhaust every scheme of self-recovery. Then followed a stage of *manifestation*, comprising the brief human life of the Lord Jesus. Perfect virtue, incarnate love, was then exhibited as the object of man's trust, imitation, and love. To this succeeds a stage of *spiritual relations*. Christ is conceived as exalted to the right hand of the Father, as passed beyond body limitations, as become a spiritual power, aiding the development of the godly life in those who believe. New Testament Scriptures frequently present the vision of Christ in heaven, in His glorified humanity—in that glorified humanity which He showed us for forty days after His resurrection. Thus exalted, and spiritualised, our Lord bears now actual, present, direct, and most intimate relations to all the varying phases of our personal and our associated life. Often we read the deep meanings of the Sacrifice and Resurrection. We should be oftener searching into the deep meanings of the Ascension. The Christian disciple may stand steadfastly gazing into heaven, watching the shining way up which the Saviour went, and trying to pierce the cloud-veil that hides His glory from view. In the moments of opened vision, which holy souls sometimes know, Stephen looked through, and saw "Jesus standing at the right hand of God." Saul of Tarsus heard the voice of Him he was persecuting speaking out of the heavenly places; and St. John saw Christ, in the sublime visions of Patmos, standing before the throne, and, as the "Angel of the covenant," waving the golden censer wherein are the "prayers of the saints." There, in the glory, "on His vesture, and on His thigh, is this name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords." "We have a great High Priest who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God." John "beheld, and lo! in the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth." We need not, however, think of Him as exhibiting His wounds in heaven, and using persuasions with God on our behalf by pointing to the marks of nails and spear. He is God's beloved Son, infinitely acceptable on the ground of a spiritual obedience, of which the Father can never need any such material remindings. The natural body has become the glorified body; even the earth-marks are glorified, and lie now only as tender memorials of a past to quicken the

redeemed to new love and thankfulness. In addition to Scripture teachings, we can discover the necessity for thinking of Christ as in heaven by the place left for that truth in the circle of Christian doctrine, and in the demand made for it by the Christian heart. We can see this—1. God can never be rightly known by man except through humanity. The very point of Christ's taking our nature upon Him, actually coming in the flesh, being born of a woman, and in all points tempted like as we are, lies in the necessity for revealing the knowledge of God through man's nature. Man can never know God sufficiently and savingly until he can see Him as if He were a fellow-man. Therefore false religions always dream of incarnations. Therefore the true religion declares that "He who was in the form of God . . . was found in fashion as a man." It is still as true as it ever was, that man can only know God through the forms and figures that belong to man. So when he lifts his eyes to the heavenly, and through the veil of Christ would see God, it can only be by realising the humanity, the brotherhood, of the glorified and exalted Son. All visions of the spiritual and the heavenly would become unreal to us, would be vague, dim, dreamy, unpractical, if we lost from the ascended Christ His bodily and human associations. Our living and spiritual Saviour is the "Man Christ Jesus." 2. Men would be, all down through the ages, and all over the world, seeking the Saviour with their various burdens of suffering and sin. They would want the sympathy of the "Man of sorrows." They would need a Saviour in heaven. Kept in the limitations of a human body, He could not speak with voice that should reach all seekers; but exalted, ascended, spiritual, He can be the dear friend of every soul; from the east, and west, and north, and south they may come, and do come, to sit down in the kingdom of the Son, because He is the risen, glorified, living Son. 3. And the work of sanctification which has to be wrought in the renewed assures us that Christ is in heaven. There are three stages in His work as carried on in the hearts of His people. Entire recovery is not effected by the first act of faith. That enthrones the new principle. But much has to be done in giving that principle its full sway. And the one condition of progressive sanctification is that we maintain fellowship with the Father. And the fellowship is kept up by this—Jesus, our elder Brother, is maintaining the fellowship, as representing us, and pledging us. Is a Christian asked whether he is keeping up fellowship with God, he replies, "Do you mean I by myself, or I in Christ?" 4. And Christ's own are ever passing into the glorified state, where they will want Him. If the marks of His manhood do not still appear, our passing friends will feel strange in their new home. Surely it must be the soul's recognition of its long-loved Brother, and Friend, and Saviour that will unseal the eyes, and bring recognition of glorified mothers, and children, and friends. Call it what you may, the Christian heart clings to the conviction that "Jesus lives": He is in heaven. He still reveals the Father. He still welcomes the seeker. He still sanctifies those who believe. He will be the glorified Man until all the elect are gathered in, and all the ends of His redemption reached. Then He shall "see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied."

II. **Christ in heaven—in particular, His relation to Christian sins, and to the states of mind into which we are brought by sins.**—The word translated "Advocate" is the word "Paraclete," with which we are familiar as describing the Holy Spirit. It exactly means, "One who may be called upon for help." And in calling Christ our "Advocate" attention is directed to His relation to *us* as a Helper. It is not designed, by the use of this word, to indicate the exact nature of His relationship to God.

He is *our* Advocate, appearing in the presence of God *for us*. It is needful to point this out, because, having the idea of the barrister and lawyer in our minds, we too easily transfer our legal fictions to God, and thereby sadly misconceive His relations both with Christ and with men. Then He is Advocate *with the Father*: not with a Judge; not *before* the Father, but *with* Him. Not using persuasions before the Father, or arguments to guide the Judge, but the Father's own Helper, provided by the Father in His great love for the helping of His redeemed family. Moreover, it is Jesus Christ the *righteous* who is Advocate. Not Jesus Christ the priest. Not Jesus Christ the sacrifice, or the atonement, but Jesus Christ the righteous. His fellowship with the Father, as representing us, is based on His merit, His righteousness—the righteousness of His Sonship, the obedience of the Divine will unto and through death. His righteousness is perfect; therefore the fellowship is never broken, and He can use all the privileges belonging to that fellowship for the helping, comforting, teaching, saving, of His people. 1. Christ in heaven ensures the abiding forgiveness of Christian sins. In Christ the righteous we stand ever before the Father as accepted, righteous sons. Every act of sin breaks our fellowship. The holy Father could not pass by even the least sin in the children He loves so well. If every act of Christian sin actually broke up our fellowship with the Father, how hopeless our condition would be! Our elder Brother keeps up the fellowship for us. 2. Christ in heaven is the living Friend by whose help we are delivered from the power of Christian sins. He covers with His righteousness all our wrong; but He can never cover any unrepented wrong. Christ supposes that we really *want* to put the sin away, and comes in the power of His Spirit to help us. Every one who honestly struggles against sin may be sure of the presence of Jesus to root out of his soul the very love and desire of it. Under this most inspiring truth shall we (1) dare to presume, or (2) dare to despond?

The Advocate in the Court of Mercy. This opening sentence reminds us—

I. **Of the speaker's venerable age.**—Sixty years before he had clasped the hand of Christ, drooped his head on the breast of incarnate Love. He had stood by the cross, witnessed the Ascension, seen Jerusalem in its glory and final ruin. Last of apostles who had stood face to face with Jesus.

II. **It reveals his tender love.**—His love glows in the epithet of endearment with which he habitually addresses his younger companions in the faith.

III. **His authority as a teacher.**—All inspired men speak with equal authority of office, but not with equal authority of knowledge—with equal accuracy, but not with equal range of light. His writings are marked by simplicity, gentleness, and love. 1. *Consider the fact.* "We have an Advocate." (1) *Such a mediatorial office can only exist by the appointment of the absolute Ruler.* Behind the great mystery of the Redemption there is the love of a Father contriving it all, inspiring it all, explaining it all. (2) *It proves our need of an Advocate.* There is a wise and exact economy in all the works, and ways, and words of the Divine Father. He never grants a needless gift, never founds a needless institution. (3) *He pleads for us in the court of mercy.* Propitiation, in its meaning, includes the idea of mercy. The propitiatory was the mercy-seat. "Be propitious to me" is fitly rendered "Be merciful to me." (4) "*Advocate*" *is the title of a helper whose aid must be invoked.* An advocate is one who is called to the aid of a client. Christ is silent until we invoke Him. A cry to Him will bring Him to our side as a kind and faithful Pleader. 2. *The qualifications of the Person to whom this advocacy is entrusted* Our Pleader is "Jesus Christ the righteous." (1) *His character,* "*the righteous.*" The

rectitude of Jesus is emphatically perfect. Theorists confess their faith in the spotless splendour of His humanity. (2) *His plea.* God saves transgressors on the ground of righteous substitution. Jesus is the second Adam, the Sponsor for those who believe. "He, for us, has fulfilled the law; we, in Him, are fulfillers of the law." (3) *His nature.* He has all natural qualifications for the undertaking. He is God and man. (4) *His acquaintance with your case.* Before you confide to Him a single secret, His acquaintance with your whole life is intimate and perfect. "He knew what was in man." Christ knows the worst of us. 3. *Trace the influence which these things are to have upon our lives.* (1) *You are to avoid presumption.* "That ye sin not." We must not so hold the doctrine of Christ's substitutionary work that the thought of it will make us less alive to the enormity of sin, and less afraid of its defilement, than we should otherwise have been. The merit of Christ justifies none but those whom His Spirit sanctifies. (2) *You are to avoid despondency.* "If *any man sin.*" The men whose spiritual life is most faint and wavering are most in danger of presumption; and the men whose spiritual life is most advanced are sometimes in danger of despondency. Keen perception of sin, leading to despondency, is not always caused by growing holiness. The backslider may feel it. Almost every awakened sinner has felt it. Whoever feels it, here is a revelation that furnishes an antidote to all despair: "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."—*Charles Stanford, D.D.*

Christ the Righteous.—The Armenian translation adds to the term "righteous," "and blameless"; and it is evident that what we may properly call our Lord's moral and religious character is the thing upon which attention is fixed. The Son, the "Man Christ Jesus," does actually stand in full and perfect acceptance with the Father, with God, on the ground of His personal righteousness as a Son, and as a man. That personal acceptance gives Him the place, the right, and the power for His advocacy in our behalf. It is most important to the understanding of St. John that we should realise how entirely his mind and heart were absorbed in the contemplation of the *person* of Christ, even to the exclusion of direct references to Christ's *work.* To understand our Lord's redemptive *work*, we must seek the guidance of St. Paul; to understand our Lord's redemptive *power*, we must seek the guidance of St. John. Our Lord presents the only blameless example of human nature. He is "righteous." He is human nature entirely recovered, absolutely delivered from the effects of the Fall; He is God's idea of a human son realised; and there can therefore be no conceivable hindrance to His acceptance with the Father. Scripture writers are exceedingly jealous over not the merely negative "sinlessness," but over the positive "righteousness," of Christ. (See John xvi. 8-10; Heb. vii. 26; 1 Pet. iii. 18.) And the righteousness of Christ is a distinctly human righteousness, because it has been gained through the testing of a human body and an earthly experience. It is not an innocent condition in which Christ was set, but a righteousness which Christ has won under the conditions in which we have to win our righteousness. It is therefore distinctly relative to us. It is a leadership of us. It can be a representative of us. Christ before the throne, Christ the Son before the Father, standing in the acceptance of His own humanly won righteousness, is our Advocate, and pleads for us on the ground of that righteousness.

Vers. 1, 2. *Propitiation for Sin.*—Let us not be afraid of a theory of the Atonement. Vagueness in this matter is spiritual weakness. The word "propitiation" has a well-defined meaning, and in itself embodies a theory; and

when we read it with what else Scripture teaches, we cannot be wrong in saying that the death of the Lord Jesus is the one means by which God extends His favour to sinful men.

I. **The need of propitiation.**—To propitiate is to turn away wrath. Propitiation implies wrath. Words occur all through Scripture which indicate more than Divine sorrow, even Divine displeasure, Divine wrath. So there is Divine wrath to be turned away; whilst that wrath remains God cannot receive man, and man cannot go to God. And Divine forgiveness must be legal. God is not only Father, He is Sovereign; sin is the rejection of His law, rebellion against His majesty, and its forgiveness must be in harmony with law, and the inviolable claims of His throne. Before God can receive back the sinner there is wrath to be averted in some way by which righteousness shall be equally honoured with mercy. And man needs such propitiation too; his moral sense must be satisfied in any adequate redemption.

II. **The propitiation provided.**—1. This is a propitiation provided and made by God Himself. 2. This propitiation is by the substitutionary offering of God the Son. Sin cannot be transferred, but penalty can. 3. This propitiation is sufficient for the sins of the world.

III. **The propitiation made use of.**—Propitiation does not save; it makes it possible for us to go to God; it enables Him to throw His door wide open, and to receive graciously and love freely all who come; but we must tread that open way, we must go to Him. That is where faith comes in. "We are saved through faith." The end of the propitiation is the filial relationship fulfilled, and that is salvation.—*Charles New.*

Ver. 2. *The Ends Attained by Propitiation.*—1. It is the fullest revelation of the Divine character. It sets before us, in one great act, the righteousness and the mercy of God. The cross proclaims the pardon for which infinite love solicits. The heart of God yields to itself. But how can this be? It is because the pardon solicited by love is obtained by a sacrifice which equally exhibits God's righteousness. 2. If men are to be saved at all, they must be saved *to holiness*; they must be sanctified as well as forgiven. The result cannot be otherwise for those who truly believe in the sacrifice of Christ as thus explained. Holiness and love, the two great elements of the character of God—these are expressed in the cross, and they must be reproduced in the character of those for whom the cross does its appointed work. —*C. Bailhache.*

Christ's Death.

I. **Christ's death was vicarious.**—He did not merely die for our benefit, in order to our good; He died in our stead. Christ the sinless One suffered for the sinful in the place of the sinful.

II. **Christ's death was propitiatory.**—When parties are at variance with each other, we speak of the offended party, especially if he be a superior, as becoming propitious, or propitiated, when the displeasure is removed, and the variance gives place to favour.

III. **Christ's death is expiatory.**—Propitiation and expiation are constantly used as synonymous terms.

IV. **In our Lord's death God's righteousness is manifested in inseparable union with His grace.**

V. **Christ's death is fraught with moral benefit to mankind.**—Its great object is to bring us back to God, the fountain of all goodness. When we come under its power, our character is transformed; we are delivered from the tyranny of sin, and come under the sway of holy principle, which permeates and controls our life in all the relations we bear, and in all the circumstances in which we can be placed.—*James Kennedy, M.A.*

Propitiation for Christian Sins.—"For our sins." Whatever may be the meaning of the word "propitiation" in the New Testament generally,

it is quite clear that in this passage it is directly connected with the *sins of Christians.* In only a very indirect way can this passage be connected with the sins of the whole world. That at least is the large and general truth, and St. John is laying emphasis on the particular and precise truth. Propitiation, as connected with Christian sins, must be represented most effectively by the restoration of peace in a home that has been broken up by the children's wrong-doing. The word cannot here mean propitiatory sacrifice, because it is the *Person* Christ, and not the *work* of Christ, that is referred to in the passage. It is Jesus Christ the righteous; and His personal righteousness is evidently the ground or basis of the propitiation. *He* is—He Himself is—the propitiation for our sins. He, standing before God in His righteousness, is the basis of God's gracious and peaceful relations with us. Christ, as it were, pledges the family obedience, and so wins and keeps the peace of the home.

The World's Propitiation.—"But also for the whole world." This expression requires us to recognise at once a sameness, and a difference, in the senses in which propitiation is to be applied to the *sin-frailties* of Christians, and the *sin-wilfulnesses* of the world. It reminds us of the expression of St. Paul, "The living God, who is the Saviour of all men, *specially* of them that believe." What is presented to thought is, that God the Son has undertaken a twofold work of grace. He has undertaken to deal with, in order to secure their removal, the difficulties occasioned by "our sins," *i.e.* our Christian frailties, imperfections, and temporary wilfulnesses. And He has also undertaken to deal with all the difficulties, disabilities, and penalties which have come through the world's wilful sin. Christ bears brotherly and helpful relations to those who are sons indeed, and also to those who are sons, though heedless of the fact.

Ver. 3. *Obedience the Secret of the Higher Knowledge.*—"And hereby know we that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." The reference is to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to that full apprehension of Him which is so entirely different from mere acquaintance. There may be only one way in which we can get to know *things.* The laws of mind may be as absolute and universal as the laws of nature. But there are many ways in which we can get to know *persons.* 1. We can make them a subject of study, watch their conduct under varying circumstances, and form our impressions, which will be more or less correct and complete. In that way, however, we can never come to know more than the *surface* of a man. The spiritual being, who is the real man, makes only a very imperfect impression upon us, in that way. No amount of study will ever do more than give us apprehension of a man from the outside. 2. We can come into direct, constant, personal associations with a man, and thus come to know him through daily intercourse. The persons on earth whom we know best we know in this way, and the knowledge comes by *feeling* rather than by thinking. The good son never thinks of studying his mother, but he knows her well. 3. We can yield ourselves in personal service to a man, and thus come to the very fullest and highest knowledge of him. It is said that "No man is a hero to his own valet." And it is so because a man opens up his real and true self to him who serves him. And our Lord said concerning the intimacy given to trusted servants, "Henceforth I call you not servants, but I have called you friends." It is but presenting this truth from one point of view to say that through our obedience to Christ, our keeping His commandments, our serving Him, come into our souls the fullest, highest, most spiritual, apprehensions of Him. We can know Christ by study, and by ordinary relations of life with Him. But we can never know Christ fully until we have entered into personal relations of obedient service to Him.

Ver. 6. *Fellowship dependent on Like-mindedness.*—"Ought himself also to walk, even as He walked." A man's walk is the expression of his real mind and purpose, but not necessarily of the profession he may make. The distinction between a man's *profession* and a man's *mind* needs to be clearly and sharply drawn. They *ought* to be in absolute correspondence; they need not be; and they often are not. What measure of *fellowship* can be obtained on the basis of men's professions?—1. When they do not carry men's minds, and find fitting expression for them. Such fellowship must of necessity be *surface* fellowship, uncertain, untrustworthy, and wholly unable to stand any sort of strain. 2. When they do carry and express men's settled minds and purposes. Then the fellowship is soundly and safely based; the man himself is in it. But it remains to be shown that for the full joy of the fellowship the man's mind must be fully *kin* with him whose fellowship he seeks. The man himself must be in it; and he must be like-minded with the other party in the fellowship.

Knowledge through Obedience.—There is no real knowledge of God, no fellowship with Him, without practical conformity to His will. St. John is again condemning that Gnostic doctrine which made excellence to consist in mere intellectual enlightenment. Divorced from holiness of life, St. John says, no enlightenment can be a knowledge of God. In his system of Christian ethics the apostle insists, no less than Aristotle, that in morals knowledge without practice is worthless: "not speculation, but conduct," is the aim of both the Christian and the heathen philosopher. Mere knowledge will not do; nor will knowledge "touched by emotion" do. It is possible to know, and admire, and in a sort of way love, and yet act as if we had not known. But St. John gives no encouragement to devotion without a moral *life* (compare chap. i. 6). There is only one way of proving to ourselves that we know God, and that is by loving obedience to His will. Compare the very high standard of virtue set by Aristotle: he only is a virtuous man who does virtuous acts,—"first, knowingly; secondly, from deliberate preference, and deliberate preference for the sake of the acts (and not any advantages resulting from them); and, thirdly, with firm and unvarying purpose" (*Nico. Eth.*, II. iv. 3).—*A. Plummer, D.D.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—11.

A New, yet Old, Commandment.—The new life in Christ will always find expression in two forms—in righteousness, and in charity. Or, to state the same thing in concrete form, in the obedience of sonship to God, and in the service of brotherhood to men. The apostle has been dealing with the first of these; he now turns to the second, beginning a new section by the direct address "Brethren," or more precisely, "Beloved." There are senses in which the love of the brethren is the oldest of old commandments. And there are senses in which the old commandment has been given anew; a fresh glow, and force, and meaning have been put upon it, and it comes to us like a *new* commandment, when we receive it from the lips of our Divine Lord and Master. Think of it as old, or think of it as new, still it stands as the second great commandment for humanity, and it is, in fact, included and involved in the first. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." It is remarkable that counsels respecting the law of brotherly love should take such a prominent place in St. John's epistles. The Churches of his day must have been failing in this duty. The spirit of self-seeking and rivalry must have been spoiling

the Christian relations. It was not the wisest thing for the apostle to attempt dealing directly with cases of contention and misunderstanding. It is seldom possible to get such matters put straight by any interference from without. But it is always possible, and it is often effective, to deal with such matters by reaffirming and reimpressing general principles, and this course the apostle takes. There is a Divine atmosphere, in which alone the quickened and regenerate soul can breathe and thrive. It is the *light*, which is the atmosphere of God. And there is an earthly atmosphere, in which alone the quickened and regenerate soul can breathe and thrive. It is *love*—the love of the brethren, the spirit in a man towards the brethren which leads him to put the interest of his brethren before his own. Nothing but love will inspire that.

I. **Love of the brethren is an old commandment.**—"An old commandment, which ye had from the beginning." It is as old as humanity. This was evidently in the apostle's mind, for we find him presently referring to the first human brother, Cain, who failed in keeping this commandment in his day. When God made man, He designed for him fatherhood; and since this involved sonship, it also involved brotherhood. The Divine idea of society was brotherhood in the inspiration of family love, which would lead each brother to care for his brother, as much and as truly as he cared for himself. What would society have been if the Divine idea had never been disturbed, if the Cain-spirit had never been introduced? What would society be to-day, if, everywhere, every man was as interested in the welfare of his brother-man as in his own? "Brotherly love is an original human instinct. Christian ethics are as old as humanity." The "milk of human kindness" feeds every child at the breast of the great nature-mother. No man, the world over, needs to be told of this old commandment. It is recognised as the first of human laws in every clime and every age. If the appeal be limited to the Jews, as having received a special revelation from God, we can see another sense in which brotherly love is an old commandment. For Moses distinctly enjoined this rule for the guidance of all social relations, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Lev. xix. 18), and the law was never for one moment disputed; the only contention that arose was over the precise meaning to be attached to the term "neighbour." It may, however, be, as some have thought, that St. John's expression "from the beginning" has exclusive reference to the beginning of the Christian experience of those to whom he wrote. It was one of the first things they were taught; and it had been taught them as an essential feature of the Christian life. There can be no "sonship" without "brotherhood."

II. **Love of the brethren is a new commandment.**—Two things make it a *new* commandment for Christian disciples. 1. It was announced afresh, on His own authority, by their Divine Lord and Master. It was a main point of His teaching. It never had been taught so clearly, or so forcibly; it never had been set in such a primary place, as moral duty. There was no conceivable possibility of any man's being a disciple of Christ, if he failed to keep this commandment of the Lord. Jesus Himself called it a new commandment, because He put such freshness of meaning into it, when He commended it to His disciples, and because He put such new power of obedience into it, when He quickened souls with His Divine life (John xv. 12). 2. It was embodied afresh in our Lord's example. Taking upon Himself human sonship, He took on Himself human brotherhood; and He loved His brethren up to the very limits of self-sacrifice for their true welfare. The law of brotherly love is true for Christ, since He walked in the light. It will be true for us precisely in the measure in which we walk with Him in the light. The thing "is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth."

III. **Love of the brethren is in full consistency with the Christian pro-**

fession.—That profession is symbolically represented as "light." It includes everything true, kind, right, pure, gentle, and helpful. Manifestly "love of the brethren" is in the fullest harmony with *all these things*. And the worldly life, ruled wholly by self-interest, by self-seeking considerations, is symbolically represented as "darkness"; and hatred of our brother, in the milder form of neglecting him, or the harsher form of injuring him, is in full harmony with that worldly life of darkness. "The whole history of religious rancour has been a deplorable illustration of this 'hating our brother.' Controversy for principles honestly and reasonably held is one thing; prejudice, spite, private censures and condemnations, harsh words, suspicions, jealousies, misunderstandings and misrepresentations, are the chief props of the kingdom of darkness among Christian churches and nations." (Compare John xiii. 34, xv. 12; 1 Cor. xiii. 2; 1 Pet. i. 22; 2 Pet. i. 7-9). St. John even suggests that *keeping up* the love of the brethren, by finding for it constantly active expression, is the very best way to *keep in* the light. Such a man "abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him" (ver. 10).

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 8. *Right Estimate of Christian Times.*—"The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth." The apostle Paul calls the præ-Christian ages, "The times of this ignorance." And of Galilee, upon which the light of Christ's ministry shone, prophecy had declared, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light." We can get a right estimate of *Christian* times only by contrast with a right estimate of *præ-Christian* times.

I. **Præ-Christian times are represented by the term "darkness."**—And —1. Darkness implies *the absence of light*. No sun, or moon, or stars bring any relief. And these represent the revelations of God which alone can relieve the moral darkness of men. It is not advisable to speak in an exaggerated way on this matter, and to deny all Divine interest in heathen and pagan peoples. What may be clearly stated is that God was pleased to leave the world to itself, to its own natural developments, without direct and special Divine intervention and help. But it must be "darkness" for the creature made by God, and dependent on Him, to be wholly left without any sense of His presence. The creature could but be "feeling after Him," groping for Him, in the dark. 2. Darkness implies *foulness*. And we could not exaggerate in any statement that we could make concerning the moral degradation of heathen and pagan nations; it would be difficult to exaggerate in stating the mental blindness and moral corruption into which the Jews had fallen in the ages between Malachi and John the Baptist.

II. **Christian times are represented by the term "light."**—1. If the earlier ages were characterised by the *absence* of revelation, this is characterised by the greatest of all the revelations that have ever come from God: the one that illuminates, explains, and renews every other revelation. 2. If the earlier ages were dark indeed with sensual vices and self-aggrandisements, these ages are light indeed with a higher morality, family purity, personal restraints, gracious relations, and brotherly love.

Ver. 10. *Love preventing Stumblings.*—"He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling [scandal] in him." This verse is pointedly addressed to the members of the Christian Church, and has in view the fact that there had been stumblings, scandals, and that there was always more or less danger of such things. The tone

of the epistle suggests, that St. John had been greatly distressed by the report of such things. He does not choose to refer directly to any particular cases; he prefers to treat the evil as a general one, and to meet it by the assertion of Christian principles directly applicable to the case. The idea in his mind, to which he gives expression here, is something like this: If a man walks in the light, he can see where he is going; he can watch the path of his feet, and there is no occasion whatever for his stumbling. But if he walks in the night and darkness, he must pick his way tremblingly, for there are likely to be, here and there, many occasions of stumbling. St. John's words recall those of our Divine Lord: "If a man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because the light is not in him." We have seen that the proper atmosphere for the Christian life, if regarded in relation to God, is *light*, and if regarded in relation to man, is *love*. Here St. John is thinking of the *love*. If a man love his brother, he will walk in an illuminated atmosphere, in which he can see his way, and carefully avoid all occasions of offence. But if a man does not love his brother, if he has any enmities cherished against him, he will walk in a darkened atmosphere, in which he will not recognise occasions of offence, and, in this mood of mind, he will not care to avoid them if he does see them. "It must needs be that offences come, but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh." All family, all church, all society, quarrels come still, as they have always come, out of somebody's unbrotherly moods. Somebody has been "walking in the darkness" of ill-will.

Vers. 11 and 15. *An Important Distinction.*—Light is often thrown on the meaning of passages by comparing scripture with scripture. That will reveal apparently striking distinctions and contrasts. The distinctions of inspired language are always carefully made, and they represent spiritual realities. Putting these two passages together, three things appear to view: 1. A distinction between "sinning" and "loving the world." Sinning is a peril to which the best Christian stands exposed. Loving the world is essentially an un-Christian state. Sinning is an *act*. Loving the world is a spirit, an inward principle. Sinning is response to outward temptation. Loving the world is a personal choice. 2. A distinction between the effect of "sinning" and of "loving the world" on the religious spirit and life. Sin drives the soul to God. Loving the world draws the soul away from God. Sin makes precious the Father's Comforter. Loving the world crushes out all love of the Father. 3. Loving the world is set forth as a more perilous thing than sinning. The one may be consistent with a real, sincere, and earnest religious life. The other is absolutely inconsistent with it. And yet, practically, we think but little of this "loving the world." It is treated as quite a venial sin. It is more to be dreaded than any sinful act we could possibly commit.

Ver. 11. *The Apostle's Line of Argument.*—God is light. Christ is that light revealed. The life of Christ was a life of obedience and a life of love. In order, therefore, to have fellowship through Him with God believers must obey and love. The state of things in which this is possible has already begun. Therefore I write to you a command which is both old and new; walk in the light by imitating the love of Christ. In this manner St. John lays the foundation of Christian ethics.—*A. Plummer, D.D.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 12—17.

Types of Stages in Christian Experience.—We have piety here as it appears in individuals at different periods of life—its characters in each class, and the common danger of all. I. Little children. Their piety is characterised by much affection. II. Young men—and women too. Piety in manhood is—1. Strong and courageous. 2. Full of enterprise and achievement. III. Old men, or fathers in Christ. The characteristic of these is knowledge—knowledge of men and things, but especially of Divine things (*J. Leifchild, D.D.*). It is, however, a fuller understanding of St. John to recognise in his three terms, "little children," "young men," "fathers," figures of the three great stages of religious culture and experience which are represented in every Church. Sometimes the term "little children" is used to include all the believers, but at other times the threefold distinction is clear. In every Church there are always those who do but look *on* to Christian living, those who are in the actual *strain* of Christian living, and those who are able to look *back* on Christian living. Or to state the case in simple terms, there are united in the fellowship of every Church the *immature*, the *prime*, and the *mature*. And the blending of these classes, their mutual relations, responsibilities, and ministries, make the glory of Church life; and it is skilful and helpful mutual blending that we should try to secure. Let us see if we can recognise the distinctness of these types, and the ways in which each one may be the helper of the other.

I. **"Little children" represent the "immature," those who have no experience behind them, and do but look on to Christian living.**—Of them St. John says, "I write unto you, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake"—"because ye know the Father." The very first stage of Christian life is the thought of God which brings *personal relations* and the *joy of forgiveness*. The awakening of the soul is the sense of God that comes, the reality of God, the personal relation of God to the soul. No man is converted save as Jacob was, by a personal revelation of God to him. Express it in whatever form you may, the very essence of conversion is a man's discovery that he is a child, and that God is his Father. A man cannot help becoming a new being, conscious of a new atmosphere and new relations, when once he has apprehended those two things. And there is no other possible beginning of the regenerate life. With that discovery there is bound to go another. He will feel his actual relations as a child with a father are not what they should be; and he cannot rest until they are made what they ought to be. And since he feels the wrong to be altogether on *his* side, he can but seek that Fatherly forgiveness which is so ready to be extended to every seeking child. There are always in the Church some persons who are at this first and simple stage of the Divine life. They are alive to the thought of God, and they have got their relations right with Him. But they have no experience. Christian living is an altogether unknown thing to them; they can but look on, and wonder what the long years will unfold. Such persons come into the fullest concern of Christian pastors, who, like St. John, will try to adapt their teaching and influence so as most efficiently to help and guide all such. The simplicity and strength of faith, the brightness and joy of first experience, in these "little children," are a most gracious blessing to the spiritual life of our Churches, and it is well that every Church should have such representative cases always in it.

II. **"Young men" represent the "prime," those who are in the actual strain of Christian living.**—"I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the evil one"—"because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the evil one." These members of the Church are

such as have some experience of the Christian life, enough to fit them for dealing with the duties, difficulties, and temptations that may come. When a man has reached some thirty years of life, he is in a sense prepared for life, partly matured. The unexpected will still happen; but the round of experiences which the man has gone through will have prepared him to deal wisely with any circumstances that may arise. And so there are in a Church those whose experiences of the Divine life have been sufficiently prolonged and varied to give them efficiency and maturity. They are like young men in their prime. On them the strain of Church life and responsibility rests. They are fitted for it: their experiences are fresh; none have become so prolonged as to become wearisome, the sense of strength and wisdom makes Church life and work a delight to them. They have fought evil, in one shape and another. They have felt the thrill of joy in first victories, and a great sense of *power* is upon them. But they need the wisely adapted teachings of the apostle, and of faithful ministers, because in their conscious strength lies a subtle peril. These experiences are not complete; they have no experience of *keeping on*. There is too much excitement in their experience; they are too much in it themselves. It is more an experience of what they have been doing, than of what God has been doing in them. It gives them confidence and energy. They feel as if they could overcome *all* the evil ones, and so need to be reminded that "old Satan may prove too much for young Melancthon."

III. **"Fathers" represent the "mature," those who are able to look back on Christian living.**—"I write unto you, fathers, because ye know Him which is from the beginning." This is the one thing in St. John's mind concerning the fathers, and he repeats it a second time. Their experience was complete. It might be that in the Churches which St. John addressed some yet lingered who had been connected with Church life from the very beginning, from the days of the earthly manifestation of the Lord Jesus. Or the thought may be of a long life spent in Christian relations, and bringing not only every kind of experience, but such a repetition of experiences as involves the special experience of weariness through sameness. There are always "fathers" in this sense in Christian Churches; and they need apostolic counsels, for they are in danger of checking enterprise, by being quite sure that everything attempted will fail, because they have seen so many things fail, and because they know so well how many difficulties everything will have to contend against. A full experience is not an unqualified advantage. In Christian experience it is possible to know so much as to lose faith in anything. These types can be helpful to each other in Church life. The "little children" call for sympathy, and put the brightness of simple faith into Church relations. The "young men" bear the burden of Church duties and responsibilities. And the "fathers" temper enterprise with counsels of prudence. And what is the one message which St. John considers to have its precise adaptation to each of these classes? At first sight it seems to be suitable only for the "young men," those in their prime. It is this, "Love not the world." But if we understand St. John to mean by *the world* what we may call personified (or projected) self, we shall at once see how his advice becomes applicable to *all* the classes. The peril of the "little children" is making too much of what they have *felt*; and that is simply putting *self* into their experiences. The peril of the "young men" is in making too much of what they *do*, of what they are doing in their maturity and strength; and that is simply putting *self* into their experiences. The peril of the "fathers" is in making too much of what they *know*, presuming upon their length of years and their observations; and that is simply putting *self* into their complete experiences. "Love not the world" really is but, in a figurative way, saying, "Love not yourself." And this is plain to view when we notice that it is not the "world," but the *love* of the world,

against which we are so carefully warned. That is, it is something in us, not something outside us; it is the self in us that is always—either in some secret or some open way—trying to be master of us. St. John is evidently very anxious to make this quite plain to us. So he tells us what he means by the "things that are in the world," and we see at once that they are, all three, not things of the *outside* world at all, but things of the *world of self*, the world within us. The "lust of the flesh" is a bad side of the self. The "lust of the eyes" is a bad side of the self. The "vain-glory of life" is a bad side of the self. Those things will be found to prove sources of difficulty to Church members in all the stages of the Divine life. Beginners must beware of over-mastering self. Strong men must beware of over-mastering self. Aged men—our fathers in Christ—must beware of the subtle ways in which self can spoil their witness and their influence. And St. John suggests the safeguard that will defend us at every stage of the Divine life—defend us from the precise influence of the world of self upon us. It is this—Keep up the full sense of your child-relation to the Father, and in everything watch for and do His will.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 12. *Forgiveness of Sins a First Experience.*—It is remarkable that "forgiveness of sins" should be associated with the term "little children," if children in age are meant by the apostle. The real sense of sin, and consequently the full joy of forgiveness, can only be known by those of mature age, who have intelligent understanding, and personal experience, of what wilful sin is and involves. A child's experience of sin and forgiveness are right enough and important enough for the child-stage of life; but we must look to the larger, fuller life of manhood for real and deep experiences. When a man is awakened by the Spirit of God, he is brought to a sense of sin, and of the conditions into which sin has brought him. He is oppressed above everything by the conviction that it has put him out of pleasant relations with the Father-God, and brought on him the Divine disfavour and frown. Then it is clear that there can be no beginning of Christian life, without such a restoration of relations with God as must involve *His forgiveness.* Not a step can be taken in the Christian life until we know that we are forgiven and accepted.

Ver. 13. *The Young Man's "Wicked One."*—"Ye, young men, have overcome the wicked one." It is very easy to assume that there is a Satan, and then say that Satan is meant by the "wicked one" here. But the verse needs some careful and precise thinking about. Personifying moral or immoral qualities, influences, or forces is constantly done, and constantly occasions difficulty. *Joubert* very wisely says, "The trick of personifying words is a fatal source of mischief in theology." It is not intended here to present any arguments for or against the idea of a personal devil—only to direct attention to the suggestive fact, with which preachers may effectively deal, that the "young man's wicked one" is nothing outside him, but is himself, in the untried and unrestrained strength of his intensity and passion. It is his undue "self-centredness," "self-interest." There can be no "wicked one" so wicked *to him* as his own weak, untested, over-confident *self.*

Knowing the Father.—"Ye know the Father." We may learn from the case of the apostles—those first disciples—what is the Christian way of getting to see and know the Father.

I. **The disciples were filled with the thought of Christ.**—They had their Master in the sphere of the senses.

They spent day by day with Him. They watched every deed, and listened for every word, and their whole thought was occupied with His personality. We can hardly imagine what it must have been to spend three years in the fascination of Christ's daily presence. Those disciples could think of nothing but Jesus, and talk of nothing but Jesus. And this was so far good and right. Since Christ *is God*, we can never make too much of Him; we may fearlessly fill our heart and thought with Him. His individuality can never be too forcibly impressed upon us. And yet Christ will be grieved if we stop with His earthly manifestation, and fail to enter into His greater mystery. He does not want to be seen only with men's bodily eyes. We may not—the disciples may not—stop with the fascination of the "Man Christ Jesus." He does indeed strongly impress His human presence, but only with an ultimate design, only as a stepping-stone to something further and better. "Though we have known Christ after the flesh," says St. Paul, "yet now henceforth know we Him [thus] no more." Christ would neither have His disciples, nor us, rest in Him, if we can only see His earthly features. Disciples must see God in Him, even the Father-God in Him. We may not stay with the outward show of the Christ of the gospels: we too must find God in Him, even the Father-God in Him. The earthly and the human are but stepping-stones; and yet it is only with our feet on them that we can rise to higher and better things. The way to all else, and better, is to be, like the first disciples, full of the thought of Christ, and setting all our affection and hope on Him. But, on the other hand—

II. **Christ was filled with the thought of His Father.**—All His life was seen by Him in its relation to the Father, and to the Father's will. He was absorbed with the thought of the Father. He was always talking of the Father. It was the word for God that was characteristic of Him, the sacred name that was continually upon His lips. He seemed to be always putting Himself back into the second place, that He might fill men's thoughts with the holy, righteous Father. So thoroughly characteristic is this of His teaching, that we are almost justified in calling it "Jesus Christ's name for God," and in saying that it is the very point and essence of the revelation which He brought to men. He seemed only to live among men that, in His character, and by His conduct, He might "show us the Father." Was He pure, with a strict and yet winsome purity? He was but bringing closely home to our thought and feeling the holiness of God. Was He gentle, and pitying, and merciful? He was but persuasively making all the "goodness of God to pass before us," and proclaiming the Father-name of God before us. Was He personally touched by human sorrows? Did He really take up our human woes as burdens on His own sympathy? He was but convincing us that "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." Look at His mighty works, His miracles of love and power. Are they merely wonderful events—merely demonstrations of almightiness? Nay, surely, better far is their purpose. They are signs of the Father. There are the Father's great works seen in miniature, that men may recognise the Father-hand that is in all the great things. Christ healed the sick, with a word and a touch, to reveal the living Father, who is watching by all sick-beds, raising up them that are bowed down, restoring, and healing, and comforting, every day and everywhere. Christ stood up to quell the sudden storm on little Galilee, to show His disciples the Father, who holdeth "the winds in His fists, and the waters in the hollow of His hand"; who can say, even to the winter-driven waves of the great ocean, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further"; who is the all-controlling Father even of the whirlwind and the tempest. Christ took the few loaves, and multiplied

them into a full feast for the seated thousands, to show the Father-God, who, each returning year, multiplies the scattered seeds of the spring-time into the rich and waving autumn harvests from which all His children are fed. The miracles are not simply acts that glorify Christ's power; the Father who sent Him, He doeth the works, and He stands out to view in all those miracles. They were all wrought with this for their supreme aim—to "shew us the Father." All that Christ did, all that Christ said, all that Christ suffered, has for its one object the glorifying of the Father; and His closing prayer revealed the great purpose of His life: "Now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self."

III. **When disciples see Christ truly, they go past Him, and know the Father, see the Father, even as He did.**—Seeing Christ truly! What is the true seeing of anything, or of any one? Is it ever so minute and exact a tracing of his doings or his sayings? Nay, it must be reading the heart—sympathetically entering into the very motive and spirit. Seeing is not a mere matter of bodily vision. What can any man who has only eyes in his body see of Christ? True seeing is soul-seeing,—apprehending the inner life of thought, principle, motive; seeing a man's secret. What then may we see in Christ? He tells us Himself: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." We may see the wise God as we trace the long and chequered history of our race, and note how "all things have been working together for good." We can see the strong God as we look upon the everlasting mountains, and hear the mighty storm-voice echoing among the hills. We can know the beautiful and good God as we gaze upon the jewelled lake in its mountain setting, see the threading of the silver streamlet, or watch the golden-flowered fields. Goodness is revealed to all who can read nature's heart. But how everything seems to pale, and fade, and pass out of vision, when we find that we can see and know our Father-God, in the human manifestation of Christ the Son, when we can read its heart aright! Simple souls, Christ's "little children," can "*know* the Father."

Vers. 14-16. *An Old Man's Message to the Young.*—The writer of these words was an old man, a very old man, a very noble old man,—one more than usually rich in the experiences of life; one whose work for many years had been to watch the influences for good or for evil affecting the people, so that he might duly warn and guide. We read of "Paul the aged," but the man of whom we now speak was "John the Beloved," who lived to be nearly a hundred years old. What a wonderful century of life his must have been! Born into Jewish privileges, but at a time when Jewish ceremonial had lost its ever-present Jehovah, and had become a vain formalism—born at a time when Jewish liberty was crushed under the heel of Roman supremacy—St. John must have had a hard youth-time and early manhood. For a soul with any bigness in it, any great wants in it, any yearnings after high and Divine things in it, those few years before the birth of Christ must have been a weary time—the cry of the soul ever stifled, the out-reaching hand smitten back, the empty soul left empty still. Manhood had fully dawned when St. John came into the illuminations of the "Light" God had sent into the world. Prepared by the repentance which John the Baptist demanded, he came to Jesus, "found in Him a resting-place," and for some three years knew a kind of joy unspeakable in the daily fellowship of "God manifest in the flesh." When he lost his Lord out of hand-grasp, there came years of loving service to the risen and living One—years of travel, of preaching, of teaching, of suffering, of practical dealing with varieties of character, and of opposing both subtle and open evils. Who can tell what care and what work were crowded into

those long years! He must have come to know young men well. He watched the eagerness with which they received the gospel-message. He mourned over the devices by which they were so often enticed back into the world again. Surely the young may wisely sit at the feet of this reverend, this saintly, this experienced old man. Consider then—

I. **The old man's kindly description of young men.**—"Ye are strong." If this description were not given by an inspired teacher, we might suspect flattery, or at least such an effort to say kindly things as would open the young man's heart to receive his counsels. But, in truth, St. John gives us a careful, an almost philosophical estimate of the young man. No single word could more exactly describe him. He is "strong." "The glory of young men is their strength." The prophet exclaims, "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." The word is a fitting one to describe the bodily, physical vigour of the young. At no other time in life is the frame so perfect, the energy so abundant, the vitality so strong. Oftentimes there is such a flow of purely physical power, as cannot be exhausted in the toil of life, and must flow over into athletic sports. To the strong man labour is joy, not toil; it is only with the wearying years that a man finds his work grow toilsome and hard. But St. John means more than bodily strength; he applies his word to the *whole man*, to the moral and spiritual nature, as well as the physical. We never love as we love in youth. We never desire as as we desire in youth. We never battle with obstacles and difficulties as we battle with them in youth. Perhaps it is even true to say, that we never "hunger and thirst after righteousness" as we do in youth. There is an intensity in all that the young folks do. Sometimes, indeed, it needs checking; sometimes it is not ruled by prudence. Sometimes the young man's glory becomes his shame. The very energy put into worldly pursuits may result in bringing into the soul the "love of the world," and pushing out the "love of the Father." And St. John says of the young men, "the word of God abideth in you." Only just started in life, the cares, and toils, and sorrows that make up our human lot have not yet proved strong enough to efface the impressions of the word of God, as they have been made on your hearts by early teachings and associations. By and by this may be true of you: the cares of life and the deceitfulness of riches may choke the word. By-and-by you may refuse the invitations of Divine grace, using the poor excuses, "I have bought a piece of land"; "I have bought five yoke of oxen." But it is not so with you now. The hallowing impressions of the early years abide. Holy memories of mother's prayers abide. Relics of influence from days of sickness abide. Thoughts come back that were started in the Sabbath class. Warm feelings fill the heart sometimes, renewing the sacred impressions of the Sabbath and the sanctuary. There is on your heart to-day a strong grip of Christian truth and Christian claim. As yet, you have your souls, your memories, filled up with the word of God, the desire for God. In that the beloved apostle finds a basis for his warning: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." And, again, St. John describes young men as those who have "overcome the wicked one." How graciously God must have put the hedge of His protection round you, if this can be said truly of you! Up to this hour you have been kept from "that wicked one"—from young men's sins, the sins that come in the line of bodily indulgence and passion. Up to this hour you stand in God's all-searching presence, pure from these defiling and debasing forms of evil. A stained and erring man, in the shame and weariness of old age, once said to a young brother, "John, bless God every day you live, if, by His grace,

you have been kept from youthful sins." Up to this time you have overcome "that wicked one." You have, then, begun the great conflict: you have begun to understand what life means and involves. Consider—

II. **The old man's estimate of young men's dangers.**—"The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." The old man *knows* what things there really are in the world, and what are their different values and influences. The young man can *know* very little of the world, and what he does know is largely disguised to deceive. There is an important difference between the old man's "I know," and the young man's "I know." When the old man says "I know," he means, "I have been there," "I have had to do with it," "I have battled through it." When the young man says "I know," he only means, "I think so," "I have heard so," "I hope so." Young folk often think that the dangers of life are magnified by the old people: they cannot see such pitfalls, such carefully concealed nets and gins, such gaily decked temptations, as they hear of. And yet the truth is with the old man, not with the young. It is a glorious thing to live, but it is a very responsible thing. It is a blessed thing to be in this wonderful world of God's, with all these surroundings of pleasure, and all these possible achievements opening before us. But it is a highly perilous thing; and every earnest soul will want to ask, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way," and be ready to pray, "Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins." Aged St. John could see that the world appeals to three faculties, or capacities, in us; and that, if our controlling power be the love of the *world*, rather than the love of the *Father*, then the world will be sure to lead us away from all that is true and good, and put us into the power of the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." Everybody's danger and temptation bear relation to these three things. The first, "the lust of the flesh," embraces all the indulgences of the natural passions and depraved inclinations of our bodily nature—all the excesses in eating, and drinking, and sensuality to which fallen humanity is liable. And how appalling is the ruin wrought by these lusts of the flesh! Every day we may see, on the street, the leering side-glance of the sensualist, the bloated face and figure of the drunkard; and as we see them, we can scarcely admit the possibility of our ever becoming as they are. Yet St. John, with his full experience of life and temptation, sees danger even for us. "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong." True of the powers of good in us, that is also true of the powers of evil. The "lusts of the flesh" in the young are strong. The passions and desires of our fallen nature are strong—stronger in youth-time than they ever again will be; and in their strength lies our peril. Remember, I beseech you, that the "lusts of the flesh" are not of the Father; they do not belong to the holy Father, they do not suit the great Father's thoughts and hopes for you. If you would be the Son of the holy Father, then "flee youthful lusts." The second danger comes out of the "lust of the eye." This is a peril affecting nobler kinds of men. The eye is one of the most honourable of our senses. The "eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing," and God is graciously pleased to give us exquisite pleasure in the things on which we may gaze. But the Father made them all, gave them all, speaks by them all to our hearts. St. John, however, says that, for you young men, there is some danger. You are strong; the "lust of the eye" is strong: in passionate satisfying of the senses, even the sense of the beautiful, you may pass by the Father; you may fail to see *Him*, and find *Him*; you may be carried away by the love of the world. Your very strength may make you love even the higher pleasures of life for their own sakes; and your soul,

with all its noble possibilities, will stop short of God, our only true end. The third danger comes out of the "pride of life"—a still higher kind of peril, connected with our intelligence, our thought, our ambitions, our aspirations. Many a man has fled youthful lusts, has conquered the desire for pleasure through the senses, and then has fallen before this "pride of life." We know well what is meant by that term. We watch, we envy, those above us in society; we want to have houses such as they have, to be as free with wealth as they are, to be able to enjoy what they enjoy, to take the position in society which they are able to take. And St. John reminds us of our peril. We need to step carefully, and to walk watchfully. The "pride of life" is not wholly wrong; the desire to rise must fill every noble breast; it is the feebler sphere of the yearning of our souls for God. But the "pride of life" must be kept in, curbed, moulded, well-possessed, and inspired with higher principle, or it will surely overwhelm us and degrade us. The danger for the young is that they are strong. Fill the "pride of life" with all your youthful strength, and you will surely find it is not "of the Father"; it is "of the world," and the "world passeth away, and the lust thereof"; only "he who doeth the will of God abideth for ever." Consider—

III. **The old man's counsel for the guidance of the young man's way.**—"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." St. John would say, "Young men, take care of yourselves; consider where your love is set, and what is its object." Love is always nobler and mightier than lust. Love is the holy, God-like power within us. Lust is the low, grovelling earth-power. Nothing can really conquer lust and pride but love. Then you will be safe, quite safe, if your love is right. The whole life is endangered if the love be wrong. A man always *is* according as he *loves*. A man may drive the evil spirit out, and have his house empty, swept, and garnished. But he is not safe until holy love fills the empty house. There is always the danger that the evil spirit may come back to the empty place, and bring with him seven other spirits worse than himself. The sanctifying capacity in us is love. Then "love not the world." "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." The love in us can never rest in *anything*; it must set itself upon a *person*. Our lust can do with things, but our love cannot. And our love to a person can never fully satisfy itself with any other person than our "Father who is in heaven." Then let your youthful strength go out in love to God, of whom John Tauler so expressively says, "Rightly is He called the Master of love, for He rewards nothing but love; He rewards only out of love; and He rewards with love." Love God, and then you shall keep down all lusts, all pride; you shall make such things servants to serve you, not temptations to triumph over you, nor tyrants to enslave you. Love God! What God? Why, "God manifest in the flesh,"—God shadowed to your view in your own humanity, that your eyes may see Him, your ears may hear Him, and your arms twine with a life-clasp about Him,—the God whom St. John loved and lived for; the God whom St. Paul loved, and would have died to honour; the God whom Mary loved, and at whose feet she sat up-looking, with those eyes which Tennyson so exquisitely calls "homes of silent prayer." Set your hearts upon loving, trusting, following, serving, that brother-man, that manifested God, Jesus Christ. Relying on the man Christ Jesus, you are trusting the God of love. Loving Christ Jesus, on your hearts will be set that love of the Father which alone can keep you, through all the long years, from the love of the world.

Ver. 15. *The Love of the Father as the Law of Life.*—A fragment from Philo declares that "it is impossible for love to

the world to coexist with love to God." By writing "the love of the Father," rather than "the love of God," the apostle points to the duty of Christians as *children* of God. The "love of the Father" means man's love to Him, not His to man. "The love of the Father is the true posture of the soul towards God. If the soul is evenly balanced between love of God and of the world, it is negative and colourless. If the balance incline towards the things that distract from the pure and simple walk with God, then the emotion for Him has died away; if the balance be for Him, the expulsive power of the new affection "makes the contrary attractions insignificant and increasingly powerless." A man must have a "law of life" to be a man at all. Manhood is life under intelligent rule. The law of his life will be the thing which he supremely loves. A man may love the *world*, which is precisely this—himself projected outside himself, and made a circle round himself. That *self* will present the entire series of considerations that rules his conduct. Or a man may love the *Father*; and that is man going out beyond himself, outside his own circle, and living under the most sanctifying rule of love.

Vers. 15-17. *Worldliness.*—Religion differs from morality in the value which it places on the affections. Morality requires that an act be done on principle. Religion goes deeper, and inquires into the state of the heart. In the eye of Christianity he is a Christian who loves the Father. He who loves the world may be in his way a good man, respecting whose eternal destiny we pronounce no opinion; but one of the children of the kingdom he is not. The boundary lines of this love of the world, or worldliness, are exceedingly difficult to define.

I. **The nature of the forbidden world.**—There are three ways in which we learn to know God: 1. By the working of our minds. Love, justice, tenderness: if we would know what they mean in God, we must gain the conception from their existence in ourselves. 2. By the representation which God has given us of Himself in Christ. 3. The world is but manifested Deity—God shown to eye, and ear, and sense. Then to forbid the love of all this world is to forbid the love of that by which God is known to us. The sounds and sights of this lovely world are but the drapery of the robe in which the Invisible has clothed Himself. By the world is sometimes meant the men that are in the world—as if we could love God the more by loving man the less. This is not St. John's forbidden world. By the world is often understood the worldly occupation, trade, or profession which a man exercises. It is no uncommon thing to hear this spoken of as something which, if not actually anti-religious, so far as it goes, is time taken away from the religious life. A man's profession or trade *is* his religion. And this is true even of those callings which at first sight appear to have in them something hard to reconcile with religiousness, such as that of the lawyer. Worldliness consists in these three things: attachment to the outward; attachment to the transitory; attachment to the unreal, in opposition to love of the inward, the eternal, and the true.

II. **The reasons for which the love of the world is forbidden.**—1. It is incompatible with the love of God. St. John takes it for granted that we must love something. Every man must go out of himself for enjoyment. 2. Its transitoriness. It is transitory in itself—the world passeth away. It is transitory in its power of exciting desire—the lust thereof passeth away. Man becomes satiated with the world. There is something in earthly rapture that cloys. 3. The solitary permanence of Christian action. Christian life is action: not a speculating, not a debating, but a doing. One thing, and only one, in this world has eternity stamped upon it. Feelings pass; resolves and thoughts pass; opinions change. What you have done lasts—lasts in you. Distinguish, however,

between the act and the actor: it is not the thing done, but the doer who lasts. The thing done often is a failure. Two lessons: 1. Learn from earthly changefulness a lesson of cheerful activity. 2. The love of this world is only unlearned by the love of the Father. It were a desolate thing, indeed, to forbid the love of earth, if there were nothing to fill the vacant space in the heart. But it is just for this purpose, that a sublimer affection may find room, that the lower is to be expelled.—*F. W. Robertson.*

Ver. 16. *The Pride of Life.*—This is one of the great frailties of humanity in every age, and it gains expression in every class of society. The forms it took in the days of the apostle John, and in the Christian Churches to which he wrote, may be studied, and used to give point to his counsels and warnings. Attention is now fixed on this—that the "pride of life" is a self-toned circle of which the centre is self. The essence of it is *self-superiority*: it is the Pharisaic "I thank thee that I am not as other men are." It is pride of the peculiarities that mark our lives off from the lives of others. It may be pride of superior intellect, or superior acquirements, or superior birth, or superior station, or superior tastes. Our differences from others are no moral temptations to us while we regard them as a Divine trust committed to us, as an agency for service to others. "Who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou hast not received?"

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 18, 19.

The Time of the Antichrists.—"It is the last time," or more correctly, "it is a last hour." By this figurative term the apostle indicates a time of severe conflict. We precisely express his meaning when we say, "Things are reaching a climax." Much mistake has been made by taking the expression "last time" in a strictly temporal sense. What St. John meant to say was this, "Things are evidently coming to a point." When we come to deal closely and philosophically with the term "last time," we are compelled to see that so long as God lives, and is actively working, there cannot be any such thing as a "last time." There never has been, and there never can be. Seemingly last things were only last of parts of a series. There never yet was an end that was not also a beginning,—just as you cannot destroy one particle of matter; you can only change its form and relations. The "last times" of St. John have come and gone, but the Christian ages continue; and every time in those ages when a great fight has arisen over some imperilled Christian truth has been a "last time" in St. John's sense. The conflict over the "filioque" was a last time. The Arian struggle was a "last time." The Reformation was a "last time." Another point has too often escaped attention. The name "Christ" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word "Messiah," and therefore the term "antichrist" is strictly referable to any one who opposes or denies the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth, and all that it involved. But that was a particular phase of conflict which belonged exclusively to the times of St. John. For the Christian nations it is a controversy that is dead and gone, or lingering only, in a small way, in the controversy with the Jew. *We* have filled the term "antichrist" with our own meanings, and so have quite forgotten the very precise and limited connotation of the term in the time of the first Christian Church. In these verses three things are urged on attention.

I. **The Christian Churches had been warned to expect antichrist.**—"Ye have heard that antichrist shall come." Warnings had been fully given by our Lord Himself (Matt. xxiv. 5, 23, 24). And it could not have been otherwise, human nature being what it is. Was ever anything provided for humanity,

or proclaimed to humanity, which was not opposed? Was ever scientific theory or theological doctrine presented without arousing contradiction? Enthusiastic men may take up some new thing, and imagine that, unhindered, it is going to carry all before it; but it never does. It succeeds at all only by forcing its way through and against obstacles. Christianity is a Divine force, but it works, and can only work, under human conditions. It was a dream that it would go forth to conquer, in such a sense as that; crushing all opposition, it would never have any fighting to do. Our Lord never for one moment encouraged that delusion. The result of His coming would be to set men at variance; and His truth would have as big a fight as His people. It must be so; and it was better that it should be so. Man never can get his best things save through conflict. And it is in wrestlings against antichrists that the Christian truth has been at once unfolded and preserved. And it will always be kept in similar conflicts.

II. **The antichrists had come, and proved to be many.**—If the singular "antichrist" is employed, it is only as a collective or representative term. To find some single person answering to antichrist has been a kind of mania in the Church. There never was only one; there is not now; and there never will be. St. John does all that he can toward correcting that serious mistake when he says, "even now are there many antichrists," suggesting as the conclusion of his sentence, "and how many more there will be by-and-by." When once we have mastered the fact, that antichrists, in every age, are *many*, we are put upon the right lines for understanding what is meant by, and what is included in, the term. Whatever in the Church opposes the living authority and rule of the Lord Jesus is an antichrist. So it includes the moral opponent, the sensual teacher, quite as truly as the doctrinal opponent. And the very essence of the spirit of antichrist is this—setting some authority, based on the claims of self, against the authority of Christ.

III. **The antichrists proved to be mischievous persons inside the Church.**—The significance of ver. 19 as an account of the antichrists *that were in St. John's mind* has been overlooked. We have not to look for them outside the Churches. They were persons who had been until recently members of the Churches. They were apostates, who had found their position within the Church impossible, and so had left the Church, and were now making themselves as actively mischievous against the Church as they possibly could. And now we know the two classes from which the antichrists were recruited. 1. The Judaisers; or those who wanted to make religion—Christianity—a formality instead of a *life*. And such persons are antichrists in every age. 2. The philosophers; or those who wanted to make Christianity an opinion rather than a *life*. And it is equally true that such persons are antichrists in every age. Under the Judaiser, the false liberty that nourishes immorality is sure to flourish. Under the philosopher, the false pride that puts self between the soul and the living Christ is sure to flourish. Christ is holiness and humility. Antichrist is sensual indulgence, and self-aggrandisement, and everything that tends to nourish such evil things.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 19. *Separation expressing Lost Harmony.*—Some actual cases of self-willed separation from the Church had evidently occurred, and had been a source of much anxiety and distress. The voluntary withdrawal of members from Church fellowship always puts a slight upon the fellowship, and brings a feeling of unrest and suspicion to the remaining members. There is

always danger of those who leave making a party. And St. John therefore tries to quiet the unrest, and prevent the enlargement of the mischief, by helping the members to look aright on the removal of these self-willed persons. Sooner or later things out of harmony, or persons out of harmony, will be sure to separate. Outside forces may act for a while and keep in *relation* those who are not in *harmony*. But the forces never succeed in holding on very long. The natural separation persists in working on beneath all the restraints; and the moment that the force holding them together is released, they break asunder. It is so in the Church of Christ. Members that are out of harmony, either with the moral tone, or with the primary religious truths of the Church, cannot long maintain their association with it. As St. John expressed it, "they are not of us." They are not in sympathy with us. Their aims are not ours; their cherished thoughts are not ours; their first principles are not ours. And they cannot help it; they must go from us. If we stand firm in our loyalty to Christ, they will be sure to find themselves uncomfortable, and make some occasion for going away. And this is the point in which the want of harmony will most evidently appear. Supreme in the mind of the Church will be, the holiest admiration of Christ, the most loving loyalty to Christ, the full recognition of the living presence of Christ, and the absolute submission of the whole soul and life to His authority. In whatever sense *self* rules mind, and feeling, and life, the man will be out of harmony with all this. He will be *antichrist*; and when he finds he is, he knows he will be best away.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 20—23.

The First and Supreme Christian Truth.—"Jesus is the Christ." But this is repeated and explained. St. John shows how much is involved in it.

I. **Jesus is the Christ.**—This is the first apprehension of Jesus that can be gained. This begins the differentiation of Jesus from other men. There were other men named Jesus (Joshua), but this man stands out distinct from them all. He appeared before the Jews, and the first thing they were asked to do was to recognise in Him their long-expected Messiah. St. Peter expressed what all should have felt, when he said, "Thou art the Christ [Messiah] of God." This first faith concerning Christ does not of course come so freshly and so powerfully to us as it did to the Jews of our Lord's time; but we may apprehend what is always the first call of faith to us, if we express it in this form—we must believe in Jesus *as the sent One*. Jesus is commonplace and ordinary until we have *that* belief concerning Him. Then he becomes intensely interesting to us. He *has* a message: it may be that He *is* a message. We must know concerning this unique Man.

II. **Jesus is the Son.**—Fix exclusive attention upon Him, watch His doings, listen to His words, and it will increasingly be impressed upon you that what He is embodying in a human life is *sonship*; and it is so evidently beyond anything ever attainable by man, that you are compelled to call it a Divine Sonship. You find your faith claimed for the truth that He is "the Son of God."

III. **The Son implies the Father.**—When Jesus is known, you find that God is known. The Son implies that He who sent Him is the Father. And so you gain the truth that is "worthy of all acceptation," and in the acceptance of which is eternal life. "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 20. *The Unction from the Holy One.*—The word rendered "unction" signifies "anointing oil." Its reference is to the anointing of men who were set apart to special Divine service. The act of anointing was the symbolical act of consecration; the oil symbolised the endowments with which God fitted them for their work. The sacred oil with which the priests were consecrated, compounded of rich and varied medicaments, was the symbol of the manifold endowments of the Holy Spirit which should be given to all God's consecrated people. The virtue of Christian consecration, and specially its power to discern between truth and error, is the present subject. The word "unction" might be changed to "chrism," which immediately suggests the word "Christ." John is intending to contrast the "chrism" with the "antichrist," the Spirit with which Christians are endowed because of their fellowship with Christ with the spirit of error that is opposed to Him. The coming of antichrist was the sign of the last times. We too witness many antichrists, subtle signs of a spirit opposed to Christ revealing itself in many and diverse ways. We know that we are exposed to these seductions,—falsehood wearing the garb of truth; many a time-honoured habit and tradition concealing an essential denial of Christ; a spirit and a tone in society, and in the Church itself, and sanctioned by venerated names, which involve nothing less than the rejection of the precepts and teachings of the gospel. And John here affirms that we are safe against these things in the possession of the Spirit of Christ. In our consecration to Him, in our fellowship with His anointing, is given us a Spirit that cannot be deceived.

I. **This is a common Christian endowment.**—It is to a body of Christian disciples that John is writing. So simple are some of them that he calls them "little children." John speaks of a gift bestowed upon all alike in their very consecration to Christ, and involved in that consecration,—the endowment of a Spirit, the Spirit of the Holy One, in which all are sharers; a Divine instinct, which enables those who receive it to look on what is true and good, and recognise it; to look on error, and on evil, and at once detect it.

II. **Observe what this Spirit is which is given us in our consecration, and by which we are enabled to discern the truth of things.**—1. It is the spirit of the consecration itself. Decision of purpose is the secret of directness of judgment. We shake ourselves free from the influence of many a deluding motive; we are able to look right through plausibilities and discern hidden falsehood; we are delivered from confusion in the simple fact of our acceptance of one aim in life. When you resolved that you would follow Christ, you felt that you had attained a new power of judgment. A truer spirit, a spirit clearer and more confident, was yours in your consecration. 2. It is the Spirit of Christ—a chrism from Christ, who was Himself the anointed One. The mind that was in Christ is given to us; we are partakers of the Spirit of Jesus. 3. The spirit of consecration is the spirit of devotedness to our fellows. Priests and kings were anointed in symbol of their dedication to the service of their brethren. The Spirit of the Lord was on Christ, endowing Him for service. We share in Christ's consecration; His purpose is ours; ours too is the Spirit that dwelt in Him. The devotion to men which we have learnt from Christ will be our protection. Our fellowship is with Christ's love and hopefulness; a Spirit devoted to men like His to men is given us, and by this Spirit we discern all things. Christian character is the director of Christian life. The true heart of Christ within us is never-failing discernment, clearness of decision, promptitude of resolve, and stability of

will. The Spirit of Christ is the possession of all who consecrate themselves to Him.—*A. Mackennal, B.A., D.D.*

The Oil of the Spirit.—I need not remind you how, in the old system, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with consecrating oil, as a symbol of their calling, and of their fitness for their special offices. The reason for the use of such a symbol would lie in the invigorating, and in the supposed, and possibly real, health-giving effect of the use of oil in those climates. Whatever may have been the reason for the use of oil in official anointings, the meaning of the act was plain. It was a preparation for a specific and distinct service. And so, when we read of the oil of the Spirit, we are to think that it is that which fits us for being prophets, priests, and kings, and which calls us because it fits us for these functions. You are anointed to be prophets, that you may make known Him who has loved and saved you, and may go about the world evidently inspired to show forth His praise, and make His name glorious. That anointing calls and fits you to be priests, mediators between God and man—bringing God to men, and, by pleading and persuasion, and the presentation of the truth, drawing men to God. That unction calls and fits you to be kings, exercising authority over the little monarchy of your own natures, and over the men around you, who will bow in submission whenever they come in contact with a man evidently aflame with the love of Jesus Christ, and filled with His Spirit. The world is hard and rude; the world is blind and stupid; the world often fails to know its best benefactors; but there is no crust of stupidity so crass and dense but that through it there will pass the penetrating shafts of light that ray from the face of a man who walks in fellowship with Jesus.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 24—29.

Persuasions to letting the Truth abide in us.—"Abiding" is one of St. John's key-words. What had to be feared in the early Church has to be feared in every age of the Church. It is restlessness, that tends to shift men from their foundations. Nothing more effectually hinders Christian living than perpetual uncertainty about the grounds of our confidence and hope. Souls are like plants—they cannot thrive if their roots are continually being shaken. They grow in atmospheres of quietness and peace. They must abide as they have begun.

I. **Abiding in Christ is holding fast the truth received concerning Him.**—"That which ye have heard from the beginning." Apostles, and all true teachers, never attempted to shift the foundations of primary truth concerning Christ which they had laid. They are willing enough to build on those foundations, but absolutely unwilling to alter the foundations. It would be useless and mischievous work for Englishmen now to try and alter Magna Charta, which is the basis of English liberty. "Holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering" is "abiding in Christ." The primary truths about Christ concern His Divine-human person, and Divine-human mission: Son of God; Son of man; and God saving man.

II. **Abiding in Christ is the guarantee of continuous spiritual life.**—It brings the "eternal life." That life can be ours only by vital union with Him. It is the communication of His own Divine life through the channels of our faith. Break the connection, and the life can but flag and fail. Our Lord Himself said, "Without Me ye can do nothing."

III. **Abiding in Christ is the work for us done by the Holy Spirit, who is with us.**—This appears to be the idea St. John tries to express under the figure

of the "anointing." The believer is sealed by the anointing of the Spirit. That Spirit has, for His supreme mission in the believer, to keep him in vital relations with Christ—abiding in Christ.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 24. *Jealousy concerning Primary Truths.*—In our day it has been anxiously asked, "What is the minimum of evangelical truth which must be accepted to constitute a saving belief?" The answer is difficult, and will probably vary according to the religious school to which the answerer belongs. It is quite clear that there were some primary and essential truths to which apostles required full assent and absolute faithfulness; but they are much more simple truths than we usually admit, and they are sufficiently general to allow of various unfoldings and expressions. We may see how simple the truth required to be witnessed before baptism was in the case of Philip and the eunuch. If the words of Acts viii. 37, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," are a later addition to the text, they meet our case by representing the earliest tradition. The primary truth, of which we must be supremely jealous, and which constitutes the minimum of the Christian demand, is this—Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God, the Son of the Father, sent by Him to be the Saviour of the world from sin.

Ver. 25. *The Promise of Eternal Life.*—The term "eternal life" is a figurative one. Mere continuance is not the manifestly most desirable thing; and all time-measures are unsuitable to the after-life, "time" being strictly one of the present earthly conditions of thought. As a figure, the term "eternal" represents, in part, what we mean by "spiritual"; or perhaps it would be more precise to say that it stands for "the highest conceivable," "the best that is attainable." When applied to "life," it suggests full, unhindered life in God, life unto God. From the point of view of the tripartite division of human nature into body, animal soul, and spirit, what is meant by "eternal life" can readily be apprehended. It is the Divine quickening, and consequently the holy activity, of the "spirit" which man really *is*. Much has been missed by the confounding of the "eternal life" with the "after-life." It may be found in the after-spheres, but it may also be found in the present earthly spheres. A man may have the eternal life *now*. As soon as this is clearly seen, the figurative character of the word comes to view, and the impossibility of its being strictly descriptive is recognised. There are many passages in which the "time" idea is manifestly unsuitable; in them the idea of "quality" is prominent. As instances see Deut. xxxiii. 27—"The eternal God is thy refuge"; where it is evidently intended to suggest high and inspiring estimates of God, as the infinitely trustworthy One. In Isa. lx. 15, the prophet, speaking in the name of God to Israel as a nation, says, "I will make of thee an eternal excellency." Continuity of existence cannot be predicated of any *nation*. A supreme excellency is evidently meant. St. Paul, in Rom. i. 20, refers to God's "eternal power"; and in 2 Cor. iv. 17 he writes of an "exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Save as a figurative expression, "an eternal weight" can have no intelligible meaning. The following suggestion deserves consideration: One of our common "notes of value" is the length of time that a thing will last. Ephemeral things are regarded as worthless; enduring things are estimated as valuable. The nettle is worthless; the oak is valuable. The gnat of a summer evening is worthless; the elephant of a century is valu-

able. The coal that burns through in an hour is worthless; the diamond that outlasts all the generations is valuable. God, then, would impress on us the very highest conceivable value, as attaching to His gift to us in Christ Jesus. So He meets us on our own level, fits His figure to our usual thoughts and estimates, bids us realise what must be the value of a thing which can not only outlast all generations, but even outlast all world-stories, and so apprehend the infinite value of that gift which He gives to us, even "eternal life." The "eternal life" is the life which cannot be measured by years or days, but is the enjoyment of the blessedness of virtue. This is a present fact, begun as soon as the believer begins to be in Christ, growing more and more as he walks more and more closely with God, secured for ever when he enters his rest, and perfected in the glory of heaven. But this life, depending on knowledge of God, as begun here, does not lessen the reasonableness of its being perfected hereafter, any more than its future completion prevents its present beginning. *F. D. Maurice* took a firm stand in resisting the association of the idea of "duration" with the term "eternal." A striking passage from his *Theological Essays* may be given: "The word 'eternal,' if what I have said be true, is a key-word of the New Testament. To draw our minds from the temporal, to fix them on the eternal, is the very aim of the Divine economy. How much ought we then to dread any confusion between thoughts which our Lord has taken such pains to keep distinct—which our consciences tell us ought to be kept distinct! How dangerous to introduce the notion of duration into a word from which He has deliberately excluded it'!" And yet this is precisely what we are in the habit of doing, and it is this which causes such infinite perplexity in our minds. "Try to conceive," the teachers say, "a thousand years. Multiply these by a thousand, by twenty thousand, by a hundred thousand, by a million. Still you are as far from eternity as ever." "Certainly I am quite as far. Why then did you give me that sum to work out? What could be the use of it, except to bewilder me, except to make me disbelieve in eternity altogether? Do you not see that this course must be utterly wrong and mischievous? If eternity is the great reality of all, and not a portentous fiction, how dare you impress such a notion of fictitiousness on my mind as your process of illustration conveys?" "But is it not the only one?" "Quite the only one, so far as I see, if you will bring *time* into the question—if you will have years and centuries to prevent you from taking in the sublime truth, 'This is life eternal—*to know God*.' The eternal life is the perception of His love, the capacity of loving; no greater reward can be attained by any, no higher or greater security. The eternal punishment is the loss of that power of perceiving His love, the incapacity of loving; no greater damnation can befall any." *Bishop Westcott*, writing of the phrases used in St. John's epistles, says: "In considering these phrases it is necessary to premise that in spiritual things we must guard against all conclusions which rest upon the notion of succession and duration. 'Eternal life' is that which St. Paul speaks of as ἡ ὄντως ζωή, 'the life which is life indeed' (1 Tim. vi. 10), and ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ, 'the life of God' (Eph. iv. 18). It is not an endless duration of being in time, but being of which time is not a measure. We have, indeed, no power to grasp the idea except through forms and images of sense. These must be used, but we must not transfer them as realities to another order. The life which lies in fellowship with God and Christ is spoken of as 'eternal life,' in order to distinguish it from the life of sense and time, under which true human life is veiled at present. Such a life of phenomena may be 'death,' but 'eternal life' is beyond the limitations of time; it belongs to the being of

God."—*From "Handbook of Scientific and Literary Bible Difficulties."*

Ver. 26. *False Teachings as Spiritual Seduction.*—"Concerning them that seduce you." The term which St. John uses brings out very prominently that the *moral* mischief of false teachings is of much more serious concern than the *intellectual*. We need not undervalue the importance of correct opinion on religious subjects. But as mere intellectual differences, keeping in the mental range, they are too often little more than logomachies. Every shape of opinion bears some direct relation to moral conduct, and every wrong setting of Christian truth has an evil influence on morals, and can be fairly judged in the light of that influence. Concerning all teaching submitted to us we can ask two questions: 1. Is it true? That question is often beyond all our power of solution. 2. Does it work out unto righteousness? That can always be answered.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1. *Intercession.*—An ancient historian records the history of two brothers, one of whom was a gallant hero, and had lost his arm in the defence of his native country; the other, an infamous profligate, who for capital crimes was condemned to die. The hero appeared before the judges as an advocate for his brother; he spoke not, but only held up his arm. This act pleaded so powerfully that the guilt was forgiven, on account of the services rendered by his brother. Sacred history also gives an account of the debt or guilt of one being charged to another. Onesimus was Philemon's bond-slave, but had stolen his master's goods, and deserted his service. In his wanderings he met with Paul, and became a convert to the gospel; being useful to the apostle during his imprisonment at Rome, he took him under his protection, and endeavoured to bring about a reconciliation between the master and slave. Accordingly, he wrote a letter to the rich citizen of Colossæ, and sent it by the criminal himself, in which he insisted that the slave might be forgiven, and that, if he had been injured by him, or was in his debt, to charge it to his, Paul's, account (Philem. 18). Pardon and forgiveness were thus obtained, not from any merits in the recipients, but in consideration of the merits of others.

Ver. 16. *Love of Dress.*—A forcible instance occurs in *Ten Years of a Preacher's Life.* A man following the occupation of wood-cutting wrought with exemplary zeal the six working days, hoarding every cent not required to furnish him with the most frugal fare. As his "pile" increased, he invested it in gold ornaments,—watch-chain of massive links, shirt and sleeve buttons, shoe buckles, then buttons for vest and coat, a hat-band of the precious metal, a heavy gold-headed cane; and, in short, wherever an ounce of it could be bestowed upon his person, in or out of taste, it was done. The glory of his life, his sole ambition, was to don this curious attire, which was deposited for safe keeping during the week in one of the banks, on Sunday morning, and then spend the day, the "observed of all observers," lounging about the office or bar-room of the St. Charles. He never drank, and rarely spoke. Mystery seemed to envelop him. No one knew whence he came, or the origin of his innocent whim. Old citizens assured you that year after year his narrow savings were measured by the increase of his ornaments, until at length the value of the anomalous garments came to be estimated by thousands of dollars. By ten o'clock on Sunday night the exhibition was closed—his one day of self-gratification enjoyed—his costly wardrobe was returned to the bank vault, and he came back into the obscurity of a wood-chopper.

Ver. 18. *The Pope as Antichrist.*—It is singular to find that the See of Rome did not receive the appellation of antichrist first from its enemies the Protestants, but from its own leaders. Gregory himself (A.D. 590) started the idea by declaring that any man who held even the shadow of such power as the popes arrogated to themselves after his time would be the forerunner of antichrist. Arnulphus, bishop of Orleans, in an invective against John XV. at Rheims (A.D. 991), intimated that a pope destitute of charity was antichrist. But the stigma was fixed, in the twelfth century, by Amalric of Bena, and also by the abbot Joachim (A.D. 1202). Joachim said that the second apocalyptic beast represented some great prelate who will be like Simon Magus, and, as it were, universal pontiff, and that very antichrist of whom St. Paul speaks. Hildebrand was the first pope to whom this ugly label was affixed, but the career of Alexander VI. (Roderic Borgia) made it for ever irremovable for the Protestant mind. There is in the British Museum a volume of caricatures,

dated 1545, in which occurs an ingenious representation of Alexander VI. The pope is first seen in his ceremonial robes; but a leaf being raised, another figure is joined to the lower part of the former, and there appears the papal devil, the cross in his hand being changed into a pitchfork. Attached to it is an explanation in German, giving the legend of the pope's death. He was poisoned (1503) by the cup he had prepared for another man.—*Conway.*

Ver. 19. *One Fold and One Shepherd.*—One evening I went out with a shepherd to collect his sheep. After they had been gathered together, and were being driven off the moor, I observed that there were some among them who did not belong to his flock. I particularly noticed, also, that he paid no attention whatever to these wandering strangers, urged forward though they were, by the barking dog, farther and farther from their rightful companions. At last, thinking I must have been mistaken in supposing they were not his, I pointed to one of them and said, "Are those your sheep?" And he answered "No." I said unto him, "Why then do you not separate them from the flock?" And he answered and said, "They will find out directly they are not of us, and then they will go away of themselves." And immediately I remembered the words of John, how he had said, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."—*W. G. S.*

CHAPTER III.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SONSHIP.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

THE last word of the previous chapter brought to mind that the Christian is related to God by a spiritual and Divine *birth*. A Christian is one "born of the Spirit"—"born of God." But St. John suddenly feels how much is involved and included in that new Divine birth, and expresses sudden feeling in the outburst of grateful surprise which begins chap. iii. Birth brings near to thought Divine Fatherhood, and privileges of spiritual sonship. That sonship may bring some present disabilities, but it has in it the very noblest possibilities, and time is altogether on its side.

Ver. 1. **What manner.**—ποταπήν, of what kind; "how great of its kind." **The Father.**—The distinctive name of the Christian God, as *Jehovah* was the distinctive name of the Jewish God. **Bestowed.**—Compare John i. 12, R.V. Notice the singular use of διδόναι. **Be called.**—*I.e.* should bear the name, and experience the reality of sonship. Not something that is to be ours in the future. A privileged relation into which we are brought now. We receive the name because we *have* the reality. **Sons of God.**—Better, as R.V., "children," which is more comprehensive, and bears better relation to the comparison of ver. 2. An addition is necessary here, as in R.V., "and such we are." "God has allowed us to be called children, and children *we are*." **Therefore.**—Better, "for this cause": on account of our being children of the Father, the world does not recognise us, since it does not recognise Him. *Dr. Plummer* says that "St. Augustine compares the attitude of the world towards God to that of sick men in delirium who would do violence to their physician."

Ver. 2. **Sons.**—Children. **Appear.**—Made manifest; evident to our present apprehension. Omit the word "but." For "when" read "if." For "He" margin reads "it," which makes the reference to be to the *full meaning* of the sonship, which can only be imperfectly apprehended under present conditions. If "He" is preserved, the reference is to Christ, and to His second coming, which appears to have been at this time in St. John's thought (see chap. ii. 28). If we take the word "He," the likeness suggested is to Christ. If we take the word "it," the likeness suggested is to the Father-God. **See Him as He is.**—Compare 2 Cor. iii. 18. "The Divine image which was lost in the Fall shall be restored."

Ver. 3. **Hope in Him.**—There is certainly more point if this is referred to Christ. Hope in *God* is too general, since John is addressing Christians, and dealing with their distinctive hope of being fully like Christ. **Purifieth Himself.**—The word ἁγνίζειν is used chiefly in a technical sense of ceremonial purifications; and St. John, in Rev. i. 6, represents Christians as made "kings and priests unto God." The Christian's "purifying himself" must be seen in its harmony with the other side of truth which St. John presents. "The

blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us [Christians] from all sin." **As He is pure.**—The holiness of Christ, as the holiness of a man living on earth under human conditions, is our model and inspiration. Such holiness is an attainable thing, because it has once been attained.

Ver. 4. **Committeth sin.**—Better, "doeth the sin, doeth also lawlessness." This should not be taken as a merely general statement; it is specific to those whom St. John addresses. A Christian who wilfully *does sin* must not for one moment imagine that his standing in Christ has freed him from the grip of the law. St. John had in mind the Gnostics, who considered the moral law to be no longer binding on the enlightened, as a rule of life. **Transgression of the law.**—Better, "is [or doeth] lawlessness," *i.e.* acts from caprice, not from conscience; does his own will, not God's.

Ver. 5. **Take away our sins.**—Not the same as "blot out our sins." Two reasons are given for the sinlessness of Christians: 1. To take away the love and the power of sin was Christ's work. They would not want to sin if Christ was really doing His work in them. 2. Christ was the model Christian, and His example was distinctly one of sinlessness, in this sense, that He never *wanted* to sin. Those who are sons with Christ, through the new spiritual birth, never *want to sin.* They may be overborne by frailties; they never will to sin.

Ver. 6. **Abideth.**—One of St. John's special words. See Rom. vii. 20; Gal. ii. 20. **Whosoever sinneth.**—Purposely, wilfully, persistently, proves that he has not in him that new life which comes with the spiritual birth. Not having the life, he has not the vision which alone can see Christ, nor the apprehension that alone can know Him, because these belong exclusively to the new life.

Ver. 7. **Little children.**—τεκνία; not infants, but young and immature disciples. **Doeth righteousness.**—Emphasis lies on "doeth"; habitually does. Doing is opposed to mere profession, mere sentiment, and the moral licence of false doctrine. "There is only one way of proving our enlightenment, of proving our parentage from Him who is the light, and that is by *doing* the righteousness which is characteristic of Him and His Son."

Ver. 8. **Of the devil.**—Compare John viii. 44-49. *Dr. Plummer* quotes the following suggestive note from St. Augustine: "The devil made no man, begat no man, created no man; but whoso imitates the devil becomes a child of the devil, as if begotten of him. In what sense art thou a child of Abraham? Not that Abraham begat thee. In the same sense as that in which the Jews, the children of Abraham, by not imitating the faith of Abraham, are become children of the devil." The demonology of the Jews must be taken into due account in explaining the New Testament references to the devil. **From the beginning.**—A way of saying "always sins." It is just the one thing he does, and always has been doing. His specific sin is bringing accusations against God, and trying to make men doubt and distrust Him. When there is neither love nor fear of God, sinning becomes easy work. **Destroy the works.**—This is done by perfecting the reasons for trusting God.

Ver. 9. **Seed remaineth in him.**—The germ of new life from God. "Every one that has been made, and that remains, a child of God." For "born" R.V. reads "begotten" (John i. 13). "The whole analogy refers to human generation." **Cannot sin.**—Not if the new life is *alive* in him. The new life wants submission and obedience; it never wants wilfulness.

Ver. 10. **Loveth not his brother.**—The new life in Christ as naturally finds expression in service to the brethren as it does in obedience to the Father. The new birth is birth into a family, and a family life and duty.

Ver. 11. **Message.**—Commandment (John xv. 12).

Ver. 13. **World hate you.**—The "world" includes all who are not actuated by the supreme motive, love to God. For "hate" read "hateth" (John xv. 18).

Ver. 14. **From death unto life.**—Death is spiritual death in selfishness. Life is spiritual life in love for others, which finds expression in serving others.

Ver. 15. **Is a murderer.**—With distinct allusion to the case of Cain. "The first and the worst effect of hatred gives it its true character."

Ver. 16.—Read, "Hereby know we love." **Lay down our lives.**—The figure of self-surrender, reaching to the limits of self-sacrifice.

Ver. 18. **In word.**—Profession, mere boasting. True love finds expression in service. "St. John hints that there is some danger of this conventionality amongst his friends, and earnestly exhorts them to genuineness."

Ver. 20. **Heart condemn.**—There are always sensitive souls, who are much too ready to think evil of themselves, and distress themselves with their evil-thinking. Better never attempt to appraise our own spiritual life and progress; leave it with God, and bend all attention on further progressing.

Ver. 22. **Whatsoever we ask.**—Not whatsoever anybody asks. The promise is limited to those who are in the full privilege, power, and holiness of sonship. We receive *because* we are the Father's children.

Ver. 23. **His commandment.**—One but inclusive, so as to appear as two. **Believe.**—Not by a mere act of faith, but by a continuous daily trusting, which kept up vital relations. **Love one another.**—The certain outward sign of our loving and trusting Christ.

Ver. 24. **Dwelleth in Him.**—Better use St. John's favourite word "abideth." **Spirit.**—Which St. Paul represents as the "earnest" and the "seal." "The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—6.

What we are, and what we hope to be.—The things which St. John remembered, of the words and works of the Lord Jesus, were the things that most arrested and engaged his attention, and became most firmly fixed in his memory. It is a general mental law, that we remember things according to the measure of attention that we give to them. And that law is used, not swept aside, when the Divine inspiration comes to a man. Only St. John records our Lord's interview with Nicodemus. Only St. John distinctly gives us the idea of the Christian life as coming from a new and Divine *birth*. "Ye must be born from above." The apostle evidently made this a ruling idea in his ministry. Closing the previous chapter, he had said, "If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him." That word "begotten" brings before him his favourite thought, and he is at once carried away by his feelings, and led to exclaim, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!" For that begetting of the Father makes us spiritual sons; and it is not possible to unfold all that is involved in being spiritually, and with Christ, the children of God. We can, however, see what present obligations that new birth and that new relation bring. It delivers us from *wanting* to sin, and it puts us upon earnest self-purifying. This is the point of the paragraph, which may be unfolded in the following way :—

I. **As new-born, we may think what we now are.**—All the apostles deal with the Christian standing, and expect to gain persuasion unto righteousness, consistency, and service, by presenting and urging the Christian privileges; but none make so much of the Divine *sonship* as does the apostle John. St. Paul's idea is adoption into the family of God. St. John's idea is actual spiritual birth into the spiritual family, involving direct, and immediate, and complete family rights and privileges. Adoption implies something that we may *become*; birth implies something that we *are*. 1. We are objects of the Divine love. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!" The expression of surprise reminds us of St. John's familiar sentence, "God *so loved* the world"; and it may be illustrated by Goneril's answer to King Lear: "Beyond all *manner of so much* I love you." St. John had fully entered into the Christ-revelation of God as the *Father*; and indeed that was essential to the idea he had of the beginning of Christian life as a birth, and the relation of Christian life as a sonship. Outside the Christian sphere God may be the Creator, the Provider, the moral Governor—El, or Shaddai, or Jehovah. Within the Christian sphere, on the standing with Christ the Son, God is, distinctly and comprehensively, *the Father*. But birth is the fruitage of human love, and St. John sublimates the idea, and bids us think of God's giving birth to spiritual sons as a fruitage of His Fatherly love; and then we are permitted to think that God's spiritual children are dear to Him, even as our natural children are to us. We stand in the surprising love of our heavenly Father. We are called sons, children, because we are wrapped round, watched, and tended with the Father-love of Him by whom we are begotten. Perhaps we have never yet entered fully into all the precious meaning involved in our being spiritually begotten by the eternal Father, and so actually in a standing with Him beside His Son Jesus. Did we realise that, we should at once utter our thankful surprise with St.

John, and say, "Behold what manner of love." 2. We are children of God. The R.V. does well in substituting "children" for "sons"—not only because "children" is more inclusive than "sons," but because, as we shall presently see, what he has to say depends on our recognising the immaturity that belongs to children. It may, however, be asked whether all men are not, by nature, the children of God. They are, in a sense; but there is a further sense in which Jesus was the Son of God—Son by a mysterious spiritual generation. It is in something of that sense that we too may become children of God. The Hindoos speak of men as being "twice born." And we may see a double sense in which we are the children of God: a first sense in which we are the creations of His power, into whom He has breathed His breath of life, and whom He makes the objects of parental and providential care; and a second sense, in which we are the quickenings of His Spirit, and live in a higher life of relations with Him, which glorify the lower. We are children of God in a spiritual sense. And if we would understand that, we must enter into the mystery of Christ as the spiritual Son of God. His real life on earth was the life of His spiritual sonship; and this carried into a responsive and harmonious service all His bodily life, and all His material relations. In a spiritual sense Jesus was the Son of God; in that same sense we are the children of God—born, in the Divine love, into the Father's spiritual family. The life of children that we live is a spiritual life. The obedience of children that we offer is spiritual obedience. The service of children that we render is spiritual service. It carries with it the material life, and powers, and relations, just as Christ's spiritual life as the Son carried to the Father the full devotion and consecration of His human life; but His Sonship and ours are essentially *spiritual*; and what we have therefore to be supremely anxious about is the child-life of our souls. Keep that nourished into health and vigour, and there need not be any fear of its failing to carry into obedience the whole material life. 3. We are sharers in the experience of Christ. This is involved in what has now been said; but St. John brings in a point which we might readily have missed. It is one which our Divine Lord set in prominence in His great high-priestly prayer. He prayed thus for His disciples, "I have given them Thy word; and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." And St. John, in his epistle, says, "For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." The experience of Christ was that which one born into and living in a spiritual sphere must always repeat. It is another life to the material life of men. It is otherwise. There are other atmospheres, other interests, and other relations; and the people who are confined to the lower ranges can no better understand the life, and thought, and feeling of those in the higher ranges, than the uneducated rustic can understand and appreciate the speeches in a convention of scientific men. The people who were unspiritual could do nothing with Christ, when He was here on earth, but turn Him out, and crucify Him. And in every age it has been a grave source of suspicion when the Church has confederated with the world, and the world has felt that it understood the Church. It is the side of peril in which the spiritual life is placed in these days. Be spiritual children of God, and you must share the experience of Christ; "the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not."

II. **As new-born, we may think what we hope to be.**—"We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." The margin R.V. gives, "if *it* shall be manifested," and makes the reference to be to the sonship; but St. John evidently had the reappearance of Christ in his mind, for immediately before (chap. ii. 28) he had written, "Abide in Him; that, if He shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not to be ashamed before Him at His coming." And the point of the apostle is evidently this—

Our Lord's Sonship has unfolded in the heavenlies into something quite beyond our present apprehension. But it is the proper unfolding of the spiritual sonship. And we shall find that the growth of our spiritual life, even here on earth, is growth along the same lines, so that this surprise awaits us—when we do understand what Christ now has become, and is, we shall find that we have been growing so like Him, that we shall be able to see Him even as He is. If we did *not* grow and develop as spiritual children of the Father, and the Only Begotten *did* blossom into a glorified humanity, a glorified manhood, we should lose Him—lose our relations with Him, and blind our eyes, so that we should not be able to see Him. And St. John would therefore say—See how much depends on the self-purifying, self-culture of the spiritual life. This idea may be opened in two ways: 1. "We shall be like Him"—that is, we shall be matured, as a child is who has become a man. It will at once be seen what point is given by reading "now are we the *children* of God," instead of "*sons* of God." Now are we but "children," in the child-stage. We cannot now realise what it is to be children still, but children in the mature, the *man*-stage. But that is precisely what Christ *is now*, a Child matured through a completed earth-experience, who has reached His man-stage, His full maturity, as a spiritual Son. But who of us can imagine what the full maturity of spiritual sonship is? Who of us can worthily conceive Christ in heaven, in His glorified humanity—the spiritual *Child* of earth unfolded into the spiritual *Man* in heaven? You see the earth-child bright with play, the earth-boy busy with lessons, the youth learning his trade. Do any of them know what it is to be a *man*? Can any of them anticipate a man's thoughts, and feelings, and ways? And yet they are on their way to that manhood; and if they grow worthily, they are growing *into* that manhood. And when it is come, when it is manifested, they will find that they have been precisely preparing for it, and are able quite to understand it. And that seems to be St. John's thought. We are all now in the child-stage, spiritually. Jesus our Lord was also in the child-stage once, when He tarried among men here. He is out of the child-range now. He is in the spiritual manhood and maturity now. And we cannot fully and worthily realise Him as He *is*. But it does not matter greatly; for of this we may be well assured—if we do but worthily grow through *our* child-stages, we too shall become *men*, and then we shall have the great glory of discovering, that we can see and understand Christ. We can be, like Him, sons still, but sons that have grown into full maturity and manhood. Child-training may be trying, anxious work; it may seem to be moving toward nothing. It *is* moving towards the spiritual manhood which assuredly will give us the vision of Christ as He is. 2. "We shall be like Him"—that is, we shall be pure, as He is whose character has come through a severe life-testing. "Every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, *even as He is pure*." We do not know what Christ now is, but we do know one thing—"He is *pure*": not merely "innocent," as a little child is pure; but pure as a man *can* be pure who has walked life's soiling high-ways, and experienced life's temptations. Of this we can be absolutely certain, "He is pure"—fittingly figured before us as the infinitely white One of the book of Revelation. If we are ever to see Him as He is, we must become like Him in this. Only the pure-souled can ever see pure souls. Then see how this becomes an inspiration to self-purifying. If the hope of seeing Christ as He is is set before us, it will surely exercise a present and practical influence on our daily life and endeavour. St. John gives us both sides of this most inspiring truth. He who is spiritually born of God does not *want* to sin. He strives with himself that he may not sin. Yet he may sin through frailties and infirmities. But the "blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth *us* from all such sin"; and we have an

Advocate with the Father, and He is the propitiation for *our* sins. We shall see Him, when we are pure as He is pure. And if we are ever to be pure, we must now be *purifying ourselves.* We can understand this best, if we think of the immaturity—in respect of moral purity—of the child-stage. You cannot in any high spiritual sense call a child pure. You can call him innocent. You may recognise that in some small things he may have won victory over himself, and over evil, and so gained a beginning of purity. But a man can never be morally pure until he has been soiled, or at least has come to understand what it is to be soiled. His manhood of passions and possibilities must have come to him before you can talk of his moral purity. That manhood must have been submitted to its Divinely arranged circle of earthly testings and temptations, and come through them all victorious, ere we can possibly speak of the man as morally pure. And self-purification is precisely this—the effort which the new life in Christ makes to win the whole body and the whole earth-relations for righteousness. Do it. Let your life be one persistent effort to purify the self, and one day, the day when Christ is fully apprehended, you will find that you can see Him as He is, because you are like Him. The issue of the life-struggle is, that you are pure, "even as He is pure." There is one other thing that we are clearly to see. That hope, that particular Christian hope of one day being like Christ, and therefore able to see Him as He is, acts in a really practical way upon us. Usually hope does little save set men dreaming: this hope sets men working, and even working upon themselves. It becomes a present impulse to self-purifying. It becomes a present defence from the sinning of self-love and self-serving. "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself." "Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness: and sin is lawlessness. . . . Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him." The Christian hope then is of unfolding through this child-stage of earth into the maturity which Christ has gained. The Christian hope is of winning at last that purity which Christ has gained. Christ won it through a human life of conflict, and so must we. "It is enough for the servant that he be as his Master." Be as the Master in the daily sanctifyings, self-purifyings, of earth, and then the great surprise awaits you. One day you will see Christ—see Christ as He is. He will be manifested *to you*; and the secret will be this—beyond all your possible imaginings you will be found like Him, cultured into likeness to Him, and therefore able to see Him as He is. Sons come to their manhood, even as He has.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES

Ver. 1. *The Christian Standing.*—How different is the tone which men put on their teachings and writings! Some are coldly intellectual; some are wisely restrained; some are passionately intense; and some are emotional, even to weakness. But there is a sphere of service and influence for men and women of every kind of temperament—for practical James, and impulsive Paul, and mystical John. It is characteristic of the apostle John that he gives us truth with the glow of personal feeling upon it. He himself grasps the truth through personal feeling, spiritual insight, rather than by distinct mental operations. And he is to be fully understood only by those who are found in answering sympathetic moods. We may well be warned of the influence exerted on us by the scientific spirit of our times. It tends to make us think that cannot be truth at all which cannot be set down in intellectual forms, and fully verified. It remains the fact, however the scientific mind may try to resist it, that man has to *feel* his way, not *think* his way, into the best truth he can attain. As long as we have the

writings of the apostle John, we shall be sure of this—that our *love* can be the opening of our eyes to see the deepest and the best of God's truth, and the saintly soul may know Him better than the cultured mind. St. John should be recognised as the apostle of the sonship. His chief words are "Father," "Son," "Fellowship." He received fully that revelation of the Divine Fatherhood which Jesus brought. He knew in his own life-experience the exceeding honour and joy of the sonship in Christ. Our Lord constantly taught the Fatherhood of God toward men; and the apostles constantly taught the sonship of men toward the Father. The two truths answer to one another. We behold the manner of love the Father hath bestowed. We see it, we know it, we feel it, in this—that to us is given the standing, the relationship, the spirit of sons. And our separation from the world is found in this—we are like our Father-God.

I. **The Christian standing.**—"Called the sons of God." We do not hesitate to affirm, that this is something distinct and peculiar to the Christian religion. Other religions propose no such relations to the gods. There have been many forms of incarnation, but never elsewhere has the essence of the Incarnation been the manifestation of God in the relation of sonship, Divine help to the apprehension of God through the nearest and dearest of human ties, man in his best forms of fellowship representing the relationship existing between God and His creatures. Think what standings men may possibly have before their God. They may be the creatures of a Creator, and so may have reasonable claims to His care, His providings, and His guidance. He who makes a thing, brings a thing into being, is honourably bound to provide for the thing which He has made. And so "God's tender mercies are over all His works"; and He "maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good; and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." "The eyes of all wait upon Him, and He giveth them their meat in due season." We have our rights before God, on the standing-ground that we are His creatures. "He gave us breath and being." "He made us, and not we ourselves: we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand." It is well sometimes to remind ourselves of our common rights before God as His creatures. "He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." Sometimes our standing before God is represented as that of subjects to a king. We do not greatly value this mode of presenting our relationship, because a king is a purely earthly creation, a governmental device of sinful men, who wanted to protect themselves from one another. When God set men forth upon His world, He made fathers; when men cast God off, and took the ordering of life into their own hands, they made "kings." But this good lies in regarding our standing as that of subjects—it brings prominently before us that we are under the control of law and rule, and that this rule is in the hands of One altogether beyond and above us. It must be wrong for us to follow "the devices and desires of our own hearts." "God is the great king above all gods." But neither of these forms of standing before God can satisfy men who can think, and love, and trust, and yearn for a supreme object of love, one who can be trusted absolutely. Man is not a mere creature of a creator; he is not a mere subject of a king. There is a *child* in every man. And there is no rest for any man until the child in him has found the eternal Father. And this is the very essence of God's revelation, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to Me a son." "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts." *Dr. A. Maclaren*, in a sermon on this text, says: "Thank God, the prodigal son, in his rags among the swine, and lying by the swine-troughs in his filth, and his husks, and his fever, *is* still a son. No doubt about that! He has

these three elements and marks of sonship that no man ever gets rid of: he is of Divine origin; he has a Divine likeness in that he has got mind, and will, and spirit; and he is the object of a Divine love. The doctrine of the New Testament about the Fatherhood of God, and the sonship of man, does not in the slightest degree interfere with these great truths: that all men, though the features of the common humanity may be almost battered out of recognition in them, are all children of God because He made them; they are children of God because still there lives in them something of the likeness of the creative Father; and, blessed be His name! they are all children of God because He loves, and provides, and cares for every one of them." All this is true; and yet there is a higher relation to which the name "sons of God" is more accurately given; and this higher sonship is the aim and purpose of the revelation of God's love to men, and most especially of the great gift of His love in Christ. Think of the case of right relation between an earthly father and his child. There is a purely physical tie. There is a condition resulting from the long years of close association. There has grown up a very loving sense of dependence; and it has even become a mutual dependence. But there is more. There is a full sympathy, perfect love, unquestioning trust. And these bring a joy unspeakable into the relationship. The Christian standing of sonship is the relation in its very highest form. And to St. John it seems so supremely blessed, that he calls on us to "behold," to look, to look long, and fully realise what "manner of love" it was that put us in this standing and relation. Let us not fail to recognise that "sonship" involves "brotherhood." Our common life in Christ ought to bring us closely together. As Christians, these are our marked peculiarities. We have a heavenly Father; we are, spiritually, sons; we are bound in fellowship with the Father's other sons; we belong to a family, some members of which are in the heavenlies, and some are with us yet on earth; and the family name is, "the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven."

II. **The ground of our standing.**—God's love in calling us to be sons. To understand this, let us think of the prodigal son in our Lord's parable, who so penitently and so humbly said, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son," because he felt, in his deep heart, that he had made himself so unsonlike. Then if God can call us sons, we may be sure that He only calls us what we are, and in His great love He must have made us *sonlike*. And precisely *that*—making us *sonlike*, making us "obedient children"—is the great aim and purpose of the wonderful and gracious redemption which He has wrought for us in Christ. He is making us sons, so that He may call us what we are, and deal with us as the sons He would have us be. Did ever father show such love to a prodigal son as God, our Father, has shown to us, His wayward, wilful, lost sons and daughters? See what God has had to do. Think about it with the help of that most pathetic of all our Lord's parables. He had to get a prodigal thinking rightly of his father. If he *had* thought aright, he never would have wandered off in his wilfulness, taking his "portion of goods." He had to get the prodigal to think rightly of himself. The conceited confidence in the management of his own life had to be utterly broken down, as failure, calamity, and degrading wretchedness alone could break it down. He had to set the prodigal upon longing for home, and envying the very servants that went to and fro in the dear old house. He had to show the prodigal the way home. For fears blinded his eyes, and despair would have made him faint by the way. And He had to inspire the father to meet with such a love and welcome the prodigal's return, that sin and wilfulness, fear and despair, would for ever flee away,

and the sweet joy of sonlike feelings come back to the humbled soul. Types of God! Suggestions of the Divine Fatherhood! Beautiful vision! St. John looks on Christians as a company of returned prodigals—he knows that nothing but the Father's love could have won them back; they are sitting, happy indeed, at their Father's table, and they are once again called *sons*. And St. John exclaims, as he looks upon them, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed!" Do you ask then for the ground of our standing? It is this, only this, but this is everything—*our Father's love*. Would we "know the love of God, which passeth knowledge"? We must turn to the work of Christ. "The most wonderful revelation to every heart of man, of the depths of the Divine heart, lies in the gift of Jesus Christ. I turn to the *cross*, and I see there a love which is evoked by no lovableness on my part, but comes from the depths of His own infinite being, who loves because He must, and who must because He is God. I turn to the cross, and I see there manifested a love which sighs for recognition, which desires nothing of me but the repayment of my poor affection, and longs to see its own likeness in me. And I see there a love which will not be put away by sinfulness, and shortcomings, and evil, but pours its treasures on the unworthy, like sunshine on a dunghill. So, streaming through the darkness of eclipse, and speaking to me even in the awful silence in which the Son of man died there for sin, "I behold," and I hear, the "manner of love that the Father hath bestowed upon us," stronger than death and sin, armed with all power, gentler than the fall of the dew, boundless and endless, in its measure measureless, and in its quality transcendent—the love of God to me in Jesus Christ my Saviour" (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*).

III. **The world's blindness to this Christian standing.**—"Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." It was the fact of St. John's time, that the Christians were neglected and despised. But the fact surprised the loving apostle, because he looked upon the men of the world as "sons of God" too. Only they did not know their Father in His fullest relations, and so they did not feel like sons indeed, and then find themselves looking out for their Father's *other* sons. Our Lord prepared us for the treatment the world would give us. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." St. John's meaning may be illustrated from our own family life. Outsiders are strangers to all the secret joys we find in our home fellowships; and the world can never understand or appreciate the pleasures we find in our family life with God. And what shall be said in conclusion? Only these two things: 1. Here is the bond that binds the heavenly family together. Not any mental agreement. That we can never get while brains vary in size, capacity, and contents. This—knowing and feeling our Father's love. You know that. So do I. Then we are one for all human fellowship in the common joy of that love. 2. Here is the truth given to the family to use in getting back the rest of the prodigal sons. The Father yearns over them. He cannot bear to see their vacant places at the table. He wants them to come home. This opens up the gospel, which is the good news of the Father's love for His sons, for all His sons; and of this the Lord Jesus Christ, the "Man Christ Jesus," is the proof, the "teacher, the illustration, and the persuasion."

The Love that calls us Sons.—This text may point to the fact that we are called the sons of God, as the great exemplification of the wonderfulness of His love. But it is better to see that the love bestowed is the means by which the design that we should be

called His sons is accomplished. What John calls us to contemplate with wonder and gratitude is not only the fact of this marvellous love, but also the glorious end for which it has been given to us, and works, viz. that men should become, in the deepest sense, God's children. The Revised Version adds the words "and such we are," a kind of rapid "aside" of the writer.

I. **The love that is given.**—We can no more "behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us," than we can look with undimmed eyes right into the middle of the sun. But we can look on the sun's activities. So we have to turn to the work of Christ, and especially to His death, if we would estimate the love of God. Through and in the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ there comes to us the gift of a Divine life like His own. This communication of Divine life, which is at bottom Divine love—for God's life is God's love—is His great gift to men. Christ for us and Christ in us must both be taken into account if you would estimate the manner of the love that God has bestowed upon us.

II. **The sonship which is the purpose of His given love.**—John's phrase, "the sons of God," is, "children of God." Stress is laid on the children's kindred nature with their Father, and on their immature condition. Consider this great gift and dignity of being children of God, which is the object that God has in view in all the lavish bestowment of His goodness upon us. There are two families amongst men. All men are children of God because He made them; because there still lives in them something of the likeness of the creative Father; and because He loves, and provides, and cares for every one of them. But there is a higher relation than that, to which the name "children of God" is more accurately given, and to which in the New Testament that name is confined. What is implied in that great word by which the Almighty gives us a name and a place as of sons and daughters? Clearly, first, a communicated life; second, a kindred nature which shall be "pure as He is pure"; third, growth to full maturity.

III. **The glad recognition of this sonship by the child's heart.**—By the expression "and such are we," John asserts his and their glad consciousness of the reality of the fact of their sonship, which they know to be no empty title. He asserts, too, the present possession of that sonship, realising it as a fact, amid all the commonplace vulgarities, and carking cares, and petty aims of life's little day. He turns doctrine into experience.

IV. **The loving and devout gaze upon this wonderful love.**—"Behold." This is not a mere exclamation, but a distinct command to do the thing, to look, and ever look, and to look again, and live in the habitual and devout contemplation of that infinite and wondrous love of God. Such a habit of devout and thankful meditation upon the love of God, as manifested in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the consequent gift of the Divine Spirit, joined with the humble, thankful conviction that I am a child of God thereby, lies at the foundation of all vigorous and happy Christian life. But we cannot keep that great sight before the eye of our minds without effort. You will have very resolutely to look away from something else, if, amid all the dazzling gauds of earth, you are to see the far-off lustre of that heavenly love.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

Ver. 2. *Getting like Christ.*—We shall know Christ by getting like Him. The water of life takes the shape of the containing vessel, but it has likewise the property of dilating the spirit into which it flows, and, by fruition, enlarging capacity, and hence kindling desire. The sun shines upon the sensitive plate, and an image of the sun is photographed there.—*Ibid.*

The Inestimable Privileges of Believers.—Our Lord was hated, reviled, and persecuted unto death; but we see

how glorious was His person, and how exalted His character. In the same manner His followers are treated with contempt; but God declares their state to be the most honourable upon earth. To this effect St. John represents them as slighted by man and honoured by God.

I. **The present state of believers.**—Not servants, but sons. 1. *His by adoption.* Every believer was once a child of wrath. But God takes whom He will into His family; He adopts them as His sons, and makes them heirs of His glory. 2. *Also by regeneration.* Born again of the Holy Spirit; they are renewed after the image of their heavenly Father. 3. *They enjoy this state "now."* Rich and poor, learned and unlearned, partake alike of this honour. Even now, while the world despises them, does God own His relation to them. What an unspeakably blessed state is this! How different from the state they were once in! How great the privileges of this relation! To what a glorious state does it lead in a better world!

II. **Their future state.**—1. *Very little is known respecting this.* No idea of spiritual and glorified bodies. We cannot imagine how extensive will be the capacities of the soul. We have very faint conceptions of perfect holiness and perfect happiness. 2. *Yet there are some things revealed to us.* We shall see Christ with our bodily eyes. We shall resemble Him in all His imitable perfections. This resemblance will result from our sight of Him. 3. *These things we may be said to "know."* We have already experienced the earnest of them in our hearts. When we believe in Him, we have views of Him which we had not before: these transform the soul into His image. Our Lord has given us the full assurance of these things. St. Paul leaves us no room to doubt (1 Cor. xv. 49; Col. iii. 4).

Infer—1. *How wonderfully different the lot of believers and unbelievers.* Believers are children of God; unbelievers are children of the wicked one. One no idea of the happiness of the future; the other no idea of the misery. How different their feelings on seeing Christ upon His judgment-throne! What a different state to all eternity! If we believe in Christ, these blessings shall be ours. 2. *How bright the prospects of the true Christian.* The Christian's warfare will soon be over. Another day may bring him to the full possession of it. Let these prospects animate every pious soul. Let none of us suffer our minds to be drawn away by the things of time. Let every one stand ready to take his flight. Let the beloved apostle be our example.—*C. Simeon, M.A.*

Likeness brings Vision.—This familiar passage is altered in the Revised Version, which reads: "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He [margin, *it*] shall be manifested, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is." This is the dreamy, meditative utterance of an aged saint, whose interest is in the other life to which he is hastening. Compare a young man's speculative and an old man's meditative way of dealing with the future life. St. John has been expressing joy in the standing of the redeemed as *sons.* The Father's giving prodigals again their places as sons is a surprise of love. In the text he dwells on it broodingly. There is something we *know.* There is something that we cannot know. What we cannot actually know, we can argue about, and get comfort and assurance from our argument.

I. **Something we know.**—"Now are we the children of God." The word "children" is more inclusive than the word "sons." Children—1. In *fact*—of nature, and of restoration. 2. In *favour*—within the shadow of the Fatherliness. 3. In *feeling*—really wanting to be, and striving to be, children. We need not wait for the *joy* of the fact, the *safety* of the favour, or the *inspiration* of the feeling. We ought to have them all *now.*

II. **Something we cannot know.**—"It is not yet made manifest what we shall be." It cannot be known—1. Because we are unable to understand. 2. Because we are only *getting like* what we are to be. Illustrate by the boy not realising his manhood, because he is only getting towards it. 3. Because Christ is out of present apprehension. But everything that is growing is growing up to something, though it may not now know what is to be its flower or its fruit. The Christian is surely growing to something; but no Christian ever reached full flowering, so as to hang the perfect flower out in the earth-skies. All who remain among the earthly things remain among imperfect things.

III. **What we cannot know we can argue about.**—Compare the A.V. "He" with the R.V. margin "it." When what we shall be is manifested. It will be by-and-by. One thing is certain—then we shall see God. But seeing God is only possible to the creature in seeing Christ, who is the ray of the eternal Sun that comes into the sensible spheres. We have had Christ in the flesh, and men apprehended Him thus. We have Christ in the Spirit, and we do apprehend Him thus. But these involve limitations. (Illustrate from T. Moore's *Lalla Rookh*, "The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan.") We are to see Christ as He is in His glorified humanity, and then we shall find that He is what we have been growing to become like. We can argue thus: If we see Him, we must have become like Him. Try this with the apostles—that apostle knew Jesus best who was most like Him. It was St. John. Then this is a practical application for us—in the measure of our growing likeness to Christ comes to us the clearer vision of Him. If we are ever to *be* like Him, we must be getting daily towards that end, changing into His likeness, image. Our best helps are present lookings into the face of Christ. There is a story, or parable, of a family in the Spanish Indies, who were in nowise different from their neighbours in the same upland, save that, when they looked towards the sky, every one of them saw a face looking back upon him. The family got scattered, and multiplied; but, into whatever towns or strange lands they came, this mark followed every one of them—that still he saw the face which no other around him could see. Men marked that, while differing widely in other respects, all were like to each other in their look. And while some explained that they inherited this common look from their ancestors, others said that, by looking to the one face, they grew like to it in their own visage, and, consequently, like to each other. The story may stand for illustration of what takes place through looking unto Jesus: we are changed into His likeness—as, in His appearing, "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

> "For, oh! the Master is so fair,
> He smiles so sweet to banished men,
> That they who once have seen His face
> Can never rest on earth again."

In heaven, after "ages of ages" of growing glory, we shall have to say, as each new wave of the shoreless, sunlit sea bears us onward, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

The Unrevealed Future of the Sons of God.—The present is the prophet of the future. "Now are we the sons of God, and" (not "but") "it doth not yet appear what we shall be."

I. **The fact of sonship makes us quite sure of the future.**—The strongest reasons for believing in another world are these two: first, that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, and has gone up there; and, second, that a man here can pray, and trust, and love God, and feel that he is His child. Childhood leads to maturity. He that here, in his infantile way, is stammering with his poor, unskilled lips the name, "Abba, Father," will one day come to speak it fully. He that dimly trusts, he that partially

loves, he that can lift up his heart in some more or less unworthy prayer and aspiration after God, in all these emotions and exercises has the great proof in himself that such emotions, such relationships, can never be put an end to. The roots have gone down through the temporal, and have laid hold on the Eternal. "We are the sons of God"; therefore we shall always be so, in all worlds, and whatsoever may become of the poor wrappage in which the soul is shrouded. Not only the fact of our sonship avails to assure us of immortal life, but the very form which our religious experience takes points in the same direction. As the bud foretells the flower, so the very imperfections of the Christian life, as it is seen here, argue the existence of another state, where all that is here in the germ shall be fully matured, and all that is here incomplete shall attain the perfection which alone will correspond to the power that works in us. Think of the ordinary Christian character. The beginning is there, and evidently no more than the beginning. As one looks at the crudity, the inconsistencies, the failings, the feebleness, of the Christian life of others, or of oneself, and then thinks that such a poor, imperfect exhibition is all that so Divine a principle has been able to achieve in this world, one feels that there must be a region and a time where we shall be all which the transforming power of God's Spirit can make us. The very inconsistencies of Christians are as strong reasons for believing in the perfect life of heaven as their purities and virtues are. There is a great deal in every man, and most of all in Christian men and women, which does not fit this present. The consciousness of belonging to another order of things, because I am God's child, will make me sure that, when I have done with earth, the tie that binds me to my Father will not be broken.

II. **We remain ignorant of much in that future.**—John seems to say, "There has never been set forth before men's eyes, in this earthly life of ours, an example, or an instance, of what the sons of God are to be in another state of being." And so, because men have never had the instance before them, they do not know much about that state. In some sense there has been a manifestation through the life of Jesus Christ. Let us feel two things: let us be thankful that we do not know, for the ignorance is the sign of the greatness; and, then, let us be sure that just the very mixture of knowledge and ignorance which we have about another world is precisely the food which is most fitted to nourish imagination and hope. The white mountains keep their secret well; not until we have passed through the black rocks, that make the throat of the pass on the summit, shall we see the broad and shining plains beyond the hills.

III. **Our sonship flings one all penetrating beam of light on that future, in the knowledge of our perfect vision and perfect likeness.**—"When He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." His "coming" is His manifestation. To behold Christ will be the condition and the means of growing like Him. That way of transformation by beholding, or of assimilation by the power of loving contemplation, is the blessed way of ennobling character, which even here, and in human relationships, has often made it easy to put off old vices, and to clothe the soul with unwonted grace.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

Power of the Soul-vision of God.—Endeavour to keep vivid the consciousness of God's face as looking always in on you, like the solemn frescoes of the Christ which Angelico painted on the walls of his convent cells, that each poor brother might feel his Master ever with him.—*Ibid.*

The Face of Jesus.—Painters have attempted to meet the longing to see the face of Jesus which Scripture leaves unsatisfied. They show us the child Jesus, clad at times in the "tender

sweetness of unsuffering and unforeboding youthfulness," and again with the shadow of the cross thrown over His face; they represent almost every incident of His ministry and life recorded in the New Testament; they venture into Gethsemane, with the mystery of its grief and agony; they fill up almost every moment from His leaving the Prætorium and going down the steps where the cross awaits Him, with a face in which there is no guile, and a bearing that shows Him equal to the endurance, onward till we see His dead face ready to be wrapped up for the grave; they trace Him from the grave to the Ascension; they show Him, as it were to-day, knocking at the heart-door, with a crown on His head, and eyes full of yearning love, and wondering, sorrowing patience. Few comparatively of these pictures are spiritually helpful; they fail to "enlarge our sense" of Christ. Some of them, indeed, are profane in the highest degree; not a few of them tend to a worship of art rather than of God. Many of the painters had no right to touch the subject. They may have been competent to render scenes from heathen mythology, or battle-pieces, or popes and emperors, or sensuous beauty, or portraits of a county gentleman or member of parliament, but they were as unfit for showing us the face of Jesus Christ as an unbeliever is for leading Christian song, or preaching the everlasting gospel. Especially in trying to represent the Sufferer, whose visage was "so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men," they have made too much of the physical, and have missed the grand, glorious grief which marked Him for the Man of sorrows. And, after all they have shown us, we sympathise the more earnestly with the words of the apostle Paul: "Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more."—*J. Culross, D.D.*

Ver. 3. *The Purifying Influence of Hope.*—Here is the most mystical teacher of the New Testament insisting on plain morality as vehemently as his friend James could have done. His thought is a simple one—If you expect, and, expecting, hope to be like Jesus Christ yonder, you will be trying your best to be like Him here.

I. **The principle insisted on—if we are to be pure, we must purify ourselves.**—There are two ways of getting like Christ. One is the way of assimilation and transformation by beholding. "If we see Him, we shall be like Him." The word "purify" speaks of another condition,—it implies impurity; it implies a process which is more than contemplation; it implies the reversal of existing conditions, and not merely the growth upwards to unattained conditions. Growth is not all that Christian men need: they need excision; they need casting out of what is in them; they need change as well as growth. Purifying they need, because they are impure. But if there is to be this purifying of the Christian, it must be done by the Christian himself. Our best way of cleansing ourselves is by keeping firm hold of Jesus Christ, and of the cleansing powers that lie in Him. The very deepest word about the Christian effort of self-purifying is this—keep close to Jesus Christ. We kill all evil by fellowship with the Master. But holding ourselves in fellowship with the Master is not all that we have to do. There have to be direct specific efforts, constantly repeated, to subdue and suppress individual acts of transgression. We have to fight against evil, sin by sin. Holiness is not feeling; it is character. You do not get rid of your sins by the act of Divine amnesty alone. You are not perfect because you say you are, and feel as if you were, and think you are. God's cleansing does not dispense with fighting, but makes victory possible. Then first turn to Him from whom all cleansing comes; and then, moment by moment, remember that it is our work to purify ourselves by the strength that is given to us by the Master.

II. **This purifying of ourselves is the link or bridge between the present and the future.**—"Now are we the sons of God" is the pier on one side of the gulf. "When He is made manifest, we shall be like Him"—that is the pier on the other side. How are the two to be connected? We must throw across the gulf, by God's help, day by day here, that bridge of our effort after growing likeness to Himself, and purity therefrom. The one link between sonship here and likeness to Christ hereafter is this link of present, strenuous effort to become like Him day by day in personal purity. Only this effort will ever enable us to "see Him as He is." Only the pure in heart shall ever see God in Christ.

III. **This self-cleansing is the offspring and outcome of the hope referred to in the text.**—It is the child of hope. Hope is by no means an active faculty generally; she is not in the way of doing much work in the world. The hope here is a certain kind of hope; it is the hope of being like Jesus Christ. Such a hope fights against the disappointment and depression which are so apt to dishearten us. Here is a test for Christian people who say that they look to heaven with hope as to their home and rest. A great deal of the religious contemplation of a future state is pure sentimentality, and, like all pure sentimentality, is either immoral or non-moral. But here the two things are brought into clear juxtaposition—the bright hope of heaven, and the hard work done here below.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

The Making of Character.—The microscopic creatures, thousands of which will go into a square inch, make the great white cliffs that beetle over the wildest sea and front the storm. So permanent and solid character is built up out of trivial actions; and this is the solemn aspect of our passing days—that they are making *us*.—*Ibid.*

The Power of the Christian's Hope.—It is obvious to observe how the hopes of persons, by degrees, greaten their spirits from their childhood. The proper spirit of a nobleman, a prince, or a king is greater than that of an inferior person. And the reason is, because, as he comes to understand his quality, his spirit grows with his hopes of what he shall attain to; his very hopes greaten his spirit, ennoble him, and make him think of living like one that expects to be in such a state as that to which he is born. And such is the property of the Christian's hope. It not only makes him not ashamed, but it heightens and ennobles his spirit, makes him aspire high, and look forward to great things.—*John Howe.*

The Lost Purity restored.—"This hope" is a hope to be with Christ; and as Christ is, in highest verity, the manifestation of God, who is infinite purity, it is a hope to be concomitant with purity, the purity of Christ and of God, which again is but a hope of being entered into, and perfectly answerable to, the purity of God. It follows that every man that hath this hope in him will be purifying himself here on earth even according to the purity of Christ, with whom he hopes to be. Purity of soul is the aim of spiritual redemption, and the legitimate issue of Christian experience.

I. **Form a fit conception of what purity is.**—It is the character of angels and of God. It is God, as represented here on earth, in the sinless and perfect life of Christ,—His superiority to sense, and passion, and the opinions of the world; His simple devotion to truth; His unambitious goodness; His holy, harmless, undefiled life, as being with, yet separate from, sinners. Take the analogy of the crystal. Purity is, in character, what transparency is in the crystal. Or we may describe purity by reference to contrasts; then it is a character opposite to all sin. It is innocent. It is incorrupt. It is man lifted up out of the mire of sin, washed as a spirit into the clean white love and righteousness of his Redeemer, and so purged of himself as to be man, without anything of the sordid and

defiled character of a sinner. Or we may set forth the idea of purity under a reference to the modes of causes. In the world of causes, it is the scientific ideal of purity that events transpire normally, according to the constitutive order and original law of the creation. But as soon as a soul transgresses, it breaks out of order, and its whole internal working becomes mixed, confused, tumultuous, corrupt. Abiding in God, all its internal motions would proceed in the simple, harmonious, orderly progress of the firmament, and it would be a pure soul. Plunging into sin, it breaks order, and falls into mixtures of causes in all its actions. Or we may describe purity absolutely, as it is when viewed in its own positive quality. It is chastity of soul; that state of the spiritual nature in which it is seen to have no contacts or affinities, but such as fall within the circle of unforbidden joy and uncorrupted pleasure. Real chastity puts the soul as truly asunder and apart from the reach of evil suggestion as God Himself is in the glorious chastity of His holiness.

II. **It is the aim and purpose of Christian redemption to raise us up into the state of complete purity before God.**—It is curious to observe, in Scripture, what an apparatus of cleansing God appears to have set in array for the purification of souls. It would seem, on looking at the manifold array of cleansing elements, applications, gifts, and sacraments, as if God had undertaken it as the great object and crowning mercy of His reign, to effect a solemn purgation of the world. But it may be asked, Is it given to us to attain to a state which can fitly be called purity, or which is to itself a state consciously pure? There is a Christian purity that is related to the soul as investiture. Christ may be so completely put on that the whole consciousness may be of Him, and all the motions of sins give way to the dominating efficacy of His harmonious and perfect mind. Being thus held up by the attachment to him of Christ's affinities, he is growing like Him—pure as He is pure. Still the body is dead because of sin. Perfect, absolute purity it is hardly supposable may be realised here. Enough to know that there need be no limit to the process of purifying while life remains, and that, when life ends, it may be gloriously approximated to the state of completeness.

III. **How may we promote our advancement toward the state of purity?**—1. We must set our heart upon it. 2. Live in Christ, and seek to be as closely and intimately one with Him as possible. This includes—(1) A willingness to wholly cease from the old man, as corrupt, in order that a completely new man from Christ may be formed in you. (2) The life must be determined implicitly by the faith of Christ. (3) The hope of being with Christ is ever an inspiration; of itself it draws the soul towards purity. We are to be much in the meditation of Christ as glorified. We are to be raised by our longings, and purified with Christ by the hopes we rest upon His person.—*Horace Bushnell, D.D.*

Vers. 4, 5. *The Sinlessness of Christ.*—In St. John's day there were men so over-refined and fastidious, that they could not endure the thought of anything spiritual being connected with materialism. They could not believe in anything pure that was also fleshly, for flesh and sinfulness were to them synonymous terms. While admitting the Divinity of Jesus, they denied the reality of His materialism. In this there was an attempt to be eminently spiritual; and, what seems exceedingly marvellous, is the fact withal that these men led a life of extreme licentiousness. But the most spiritual of all the apostles was the one who insisted most earnestly on the materialism of the human nature of our Lord. In the natural propensities of human nature there is nothing to be ashamed of; there is nothing for a man to be ashamed of but sin—there is nothing more noble than a perfect human nature.

I. The sinlessness of our Lord's nature.—We have a definition of sin. "Sin is the transgression of the law." There is a difference between sin and transgression. Every sin is a transgression of the law; but every transgression of the law is not a sin. There must be some voluntary act, transgressing some known law, or there is no sin. But there is a law written for the heart, as well as for the outward man; and it is not the outward act that constitutes alone the morality of Christ—it is the feeling of the heart, the acts of the inner man. Some men say, "If the thought is as bad as the act, why should we not do the act? I am as guilty as if I had committed the transgression. Why should I debar myself from the enjoyment?" But that is a sophistry with which no man who has any conscience can deceive himself. Christ was doubly free from sin, as free in desire as He was free in act. The proof of His perfect purity is to be found in the testimony of His enemies, His friends, and those indifferent to Him. There was no actual transgression in our Lord's life. See too what His inward life was. For there may be no outward transgression, and yet the heart may not be pure. Outwardly all may seem right, through absence of temptation; and yet there may be the want of inward perfection. His mind regulates every other mind; it moves in perfect harmony with the mind of God. In all the just men that ever lived, you will find some peculiarity carried to excess. We note this in the zeal of St. John, in the courage of St. Peter, in the truth-seeking of St. Thomas. It was not so with Jesus; no one department of His human nature ever superseded another: all was harmony there. The one sound which has come down from God in perfect melody is His life, the entire unbroken music of humanity.

II. The power there is in the manifested sinlessness of Jesus to take away the sins of the world.—Consider this (1) in reference to *man*; (2) in reference to *God*. There is in the eternal constitution of the heavenly government that which makes the life and death of Jesus the atonement for the world's sins. Human nature, which fell in Adam, rose again in Christ; in Him it became a different thing altogether in God's sight—redeemed now, hereafter to be perfected. Consider how the world was purified by the change of its own nature. There are three ways by which this may be done—by faith, by hope, by love. 1. It is done by faith, for the most degrading thing in the heart of man is the disbelief in the goodness of human nature. What raises human nature is, faith in the perfect innocence of Jesus. 2. Trust in Divine humanity elevates the soul by hope. Notice the hopefulness of the character of Jesus—His hopefulness for human nature. This hopefulness raises hope in us. We dare to hope for that nature which Jesus loved; we dare to forgive that nature which Jesus condescended to wear. 3. It is done also by love. Hate narrows the heart; love expands the heart. To love is to have almost the power of throwing aside sin. If we would separate the world from sin, and from the penalty of sin, and the inward misery of the heart attendant on sin in this world, and the world to come, it is written in Scripture, "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," than the name of Jesus.—*F. W. Robertson.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—12.

Doing Righteousness.—This appears to be the expression of a sudden thought that came to St. John. We have often to notice how the apostolic writers are turned aside from their main line of argument by some sudden thought which seizes them. This indeed is a common peculiarity of what we properly call

"uneducated," "untrained" writers and preachers. Some of their best things come as "asides." St. John has been dealing with high sentiment. Perhaps he feared that what he had said belonged to too high a range, and therefore might be misconceived, misrepresented, and misused. Religion has both its mystical and its practical side. The mystical may be most pleasing and satisfying to ourselves; the practical is the most important, and the most honouring, to Christ. Emotions do not glorify our Divine Lord as righteousness does. Sometimes the religion of Christ is represented as being doctrinal and sentimental. And so it is. But it is also, and even yet more truly, ethical, and practical, and social. Its key-note no one need misapprehend: "He that doeth righteousness is righteous." Christ's own teachings were distinctly ethical. Apostolic teachings were very largely practical. In the dark ages Christianity was the humanising force. The gospel of Christ *is* civilising heathendom. Back of literature, and philanthropy, and sociology, to-day, lie the great Christian truths and principles. What God provides for the redemption of the world is—(1) the salt of Christian character; (2) the leaven of Christian principle; (3) the inspiration of the Christian motive. Christ has a sociology, but it is a set of living principles, not an elaborated system. Each age must make its own elaboration.

I. **A mistake often made by the early Christian disciples.**—It concerned *righteousness.* This surprises us, because Christ's teachings about righteousness seem to us so clear. Trace the rise of the Antinomian spirit in—(1) the misuse of the doctrine of election; (2) of present salvation; (3) of the new life. The truth is that the Church has always to guard against this evil. There is ever creeping in a subtle idea of a difference between a *Christian's* sins and other people's sins. To live up to the full expression of Christian principle in their old heathen surroundings must have been difficult for the early Christians, and we may pity them. We need not wonder that some of them said, "Why should we try?" or that some of them easily found reasons why they should *not try.* It was easy to urge that the new life was a spiritual thing, and therefore entirely independent of its material surroundings. Even nowaday—(1) feeling is regarded as more satisfying than righteousness; (2) knowledge is regarded as more important than righteousness; (3) morality is confused with righteousness; (4) ceremonial is put instead of righteousness. Indeed, the mistake is wont to take such subtle forms that it may have found out how to master even *us.* We may be sure of this: righteousness is *rightness,* in view of—(1) God's claims; (2) Christ's example; (3) the possibilities of service to our fellows.

II. **The apostolic correction of the mistake.**—It was the aged apostle's most anxious fear that the religion of his disciples might evaporate in sentiment. Therefore he lays so much stress on *doing* righteousness. Righteousness is the *expression* of right feeling. And right feeling can never exist without wanting to get expression. Quickened germs in the soil are sure to show blades above the soil. Righteousness toward God is *doing.* Righteousness toward man is doing. Good feeling wants expression. Knowledge wants service. Resolve wants sphere of operation. And none of these are righteousness so long as they stand alone. Does then the Divine acceptance rest upon the doing? No; let us never make that mistake. It rests on the *righteousness* which finds expression in the doing. Understand what righteousness is. It is the *objective* of faith; it is the *operative* of the new life; it is its activity in its relations. Everything that lives does something. Life escapes you. You can see what life *does.* A Christian *lives*: then he *does* righteousness. Where then is the place for Christian sentiment and feeling? It is the inspiration, and the tone, of the doing.

III. **The basis on which the apostolic correction rests.**—God the Father,

or Christ the Son. 1. Essential to the thought of God is activity. God's righteousness is *doing*. Conceive of God as non-operating goodness, and He is but a silent, mysterious Brahm—nothing really, nothing helpfully, to you. 2. Christ's righteousness is doing. Conceive Christ as only cherishing good sentiments, never "going about doing good," and He becomes nothing helpfully to you—only, in some sense, a hermit Antony, or a St. Simeon Stylites. Our models of righteousness are distinctly practical.

Apply in our several spheres: (1) Righteousness as our personal characteristic; (2) as the life of our home relations; (3) as the life of our business scenes; (4) as the life of our Church fellowships; (5) as the life of our social intercourse. Everywhere we want "righteousness"; and everywhere, "he that *doeth* righteousness is righteous," even as God is righteous, even as Christ is righteous.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 7. *The Practical Character of Righteousness.*—"He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous." It is clear that emphasis is to be placed on *doing*, as contrasted with professing, or with talking. A man *is* according to what he *does*, because in a genuine man the doing is the natural sign and expression of *himself*. *William Jay* used to say, "Do not tell me what a man *said* when he lay on his dying-bed: tell me how he *lived*." And it is equally clear that fearless appeal can be made to the practical character of the human righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no possibility of imagining that *Christ's* righteousness was mere sentimentality or profession. Nor can a righteousness of talk gain any support from our Lord's teachings, the key-note of which is this, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye *do* them." And there is another point suggested by the form of the original word translated "doeth." It means, "he who *habitually* does righteousness." And precisely in *that* we have the inspiring example of Christ.

Ver. 8. *Christ's Work on the Devil's Works.*—"That He might destroy the works of the devil." The works of the devil are here described as "doing sin." The work of the devil in man is *making him do sin*. The "devil sinneth"—that is his characteristic work. "He that doeth sin is of the devil," belongs to the same class, has the same characteristic. The contrast is with the "doing righteousness" of ver. 7. To put the distinction in language more familiar to us, we may say: He that pleases himself, and serves his own ends, is of the devil; he belongs to the devil-class. He that denies himself, and serves his conviction of what is *right*, is of God, and belongs to the Christ-class of obedient, and loyal, and loving sons. Then we can readily perceive how Christ's work must destroy the devil's work. Let Christ bring us into obedient sonship, and we shall only want to do righteousness.

Ver. 9. *The Divine Seed in Man.*—The Greek father, Justin Martyr, seems to have found the figure in this text specially suggestive, and his elaboration of it may help our apprehension. He says that "the truths in the utterances of heathen philosophy and poetry are due to the fact that a seed of the Word is implanted, or rather, inborn, ἔμφυτον, in every race of men. Those who grasped the truth lived according to "a part of the seminal Word," even as Christians live "according to the knowledge and contemplation of the whole Word, that is Christ." They "nobly uttered what they saw akin to the part of the Divine seminal Word which they had received."

"*His seed remaineth in him.*"—The following Bible writers suggest expla-

nations of this very difficult expression:—*Bengel:* "In eo, qui genitus est ex Deo, manet semen Dei, *i.e.* verbum, cum sua virtute (1 Pet. i. 23; Jas. i. 18). Quamvis peccatum sæpe furioso impetu conetur prosternere renatum. Vel potius sic: Semen Dei, *i.e.* is, qui natus est ex Deo, *manet* in Deo." *Webster and Wilkinson:* "σπέρμα is understood to be the Word of God (1 Pet. i. 23; Jas. i. 18), or the Holy Spirit (John iii. 8). We may explain it of the principle of Divine life implanted in the soul, which renders us θείας κοινωνοὺς φύσεως (2 Pet. i. 4). That which originates also maintains (μένει) his filial relation to God; and he who is in this relation to God cannot lead a sinful life." *Alford:* "Because that new principle of life from which his new life has unfolded, which was God's seed deposited in him, abides growing there, and precludes the development of the old sinful nature." By the *seed* Alford understands the *word*, the utterance of God, dropped into the soul of man. *Matthew Henry* calls the seed the "spiritual seminal principle remaining in him." *Fausset* calls the seed "the living word of God, made by the Holy Spirit the seed in us of a new life." *Sinclair* says: "The seed is the Holy Spirit—that influence proceeding from God, imbued with Divine vitality, regenerating, renewing, refreshing, causing the nature of holiness to spring, to grow, to bloom, to bear fruit."

Ver. 12. *Cain, the Unloving Brother.*—The reference to Cain is singularly appropriate, because the controlling thought in St. John's mind is, that if a man really loves God, he will be sure to love his brother also; and if a man is found not to be loving his brother, we may be confidently sure that he does not love God. There are two distinct phases of conduct manifest in the record concerning Cain. We see what he was toward God, and find no sign of any inspiration of personal love to God. We see what he was toward his brother, and find no sign of that self-denying brotherly love which alone sanctifies family life, and expresses the common love of the father. That the unrighteousness of Cain is here exhibited as the ground of his hatred to his brother is altogether in harmony with the Old Testament record. For there we see that the motive of his hatred to Abel was his envy, because Abel was more acceptable to God, but this latter was founded in the "good work" of Abel, which was wanting in Cain. St. John does not speak of the μισεῖν of Cain, but of the σφάζειν in which that hatred found expression; for he is treating generally of the outward evidence of the internal disposition, through which outward evidence the internal disposition appears manifestly and uncontrovertibly to the man himself. But St. John does not present the fratricide of Cain only as one individual result of the general unrighteousness of his works, but rather as specifically evoked by the opposite character of the works of Abel. As everywhere, so here also evil is brought to its full maturity by means of juxtaposition with the light, which reveals its character, and makes it truly dark. The wicked man, who feels himself miserable at heart, grudges the good man the blessedness he has in his righteousness, and therefore has the disposition to rob him of it by annihilating the good himself. As it is in the nature of the devil, so it is in the nature of the child of the devil; they are alike ἀνθρωποκτόνοι. And the mention here of envy as the cause of the murder accords with the record of Genesis: Cain was urged to his sinful act by knowing that his offering was not acceptable to God, while his brother's was acceptable.—*Eric Haupt.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13—17.

A Sure Sign of the Regenerate Life.—It is such a love of the brethren as leads us to self-denial and service for the sake of securing their highest well-being. That man must be "born again," he must be a new man, other than the unnatural being which sin and self have made him, who really cares for his brother in such a way as enables him to give up his own things for his sake. The principal word in this paragraph is "hate," "hateth"; and it is evidentally intended to stand in absolute contrast with "love." But the word has undergone such change in meaning since it was used by the Bible translators, and even in their time it so imperfectly represented the Scriptural term, that the precise meaning and thought of St. John readily escapes the reader of his epistle. "Hate" is often the equivalent of our word "despise," or pass aside, show yourself indifferent to, count as a thing of little value. Sometimes it means scarcely more than, "put down into quite a secondary place of interest." In something of this sense it is said of God, that He "loved Jacob, and hated Esau." What we have in modern times imported into the word is bitter, personal feeling, and that complicates our treatment of such expressions as are found in this paragraph. "To hate" is not always to be understood rigorously. It frequently signifies no more than a lesser degree of love (Deut. xxi. 15). If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, that means less beloved. So our Saviour says that he who would follow Him must hate father and mother—that is, he should love them less than Christ, less than his own salvation. Solomon says, "He that spareth the rod hateth his son" (Prov. xiii. 24). Fathers often spare their children out of an excessive love to them; but this is not a proper instance of affection, to forbear correcting them; their fond affection is as pernicious to their children as other men's hatred could be. There is also a *malicious* hatred of men referred to in Scripture—as in Ahab, who hated the Lord's prophet, Micaiah (1 Kings xxii. 8). Wicked men do, in this sense, hate the righteous (Ps. xxxiv. 21). It may also be added, that there is a hatred of the sins of men (Jude 23), and of our own sins (Rom. vii. 15). Taking the milder connotation of the term "hate," let us see if we can understand, and get the precise teaching of, this paragraph.

I. **The sphere of hate that may reasonably be expected.**—Ver. 13: "Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you," is indifferent to you, takes no interest in you, and even scorns you as enthusiasts. It is quite true that the world shows positive enmity to God's people, and is, and ever has been, ready on occasions to persecute them; but we miss a point of much direct application to us, when we dwell too much on the active persecution to which Christ's Church has at times been subjected. The indifference of the world, the scorn of the world, is constantly felt, and constantly wearing our hearts. Everywhere earnest piety is spoken against. It is the hate of the world in that sense—the society indifference which we are told should be expected, and should occasion no surprise. Our Lord impressed on His disciples that being, like Himself, "*not of the world*," the world would be sure to hate them. Then this should be no occasion of anxiety to us. In entering on the regenerate life we should take account of it, and then it will not come on us as a surprise, or be in any sense a painful and trying experience. We may so satisfy ourselves with God's approval, that we can be easily indifferent to the world's. God's world is kin with us; man's world never can be.

II. **The sphere of hate that is wholly unexpected, and cannot be approved.**—Ver. 15: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer." This is true when applied generally to the brotherly relations of man with man—true in the same

sense as the saying that "sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Push hatred out to its utmost, and it appears as murder, as is illustrated in the case of Cain. But St. John here is distinctly addressing those who have the new life in Christ, and are thus set in new and gracious relations one with another. What he says is that hate, even in its milder form as indifference, is inconceivable among the members of the Christian brotherhood. In them the great human law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," ought to be ennobled into this, "For Christ's sake thou shalt love thy Christian brother better than thyself, and be always going out beyond thyself in loving ministries and service to him." Then St. John's point may be sharply presented in this contrast, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you; but marvel much, my brethren, if you are found hating one another, even if it be only in the mild sense of being indifferent to one another, and loving yourselves better than your brethren."

III. **The mastery of unloving thoughts concerning our brethren is gained through the service of love.**—Vers. 16, 17: "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?" The point is this—Do nothing for your brother, and you will find you very readily become heedless of him, indifferent to his interests, you may even come to dislike and hate him; but do something for him, tend him, spend yourself for him, give up something of your own to secure his well-being, imperil your life for him, and you will be surprised how love to him grows in your heart, how easy then it is to "love the brethren." Activity of ministry keeps up the love, and delivers from all evil feelings. You never can hate people whom you are actively serving for Christ's sake.

The love of the brethren is—1. A peculiar and most appropriate kind of love: (1) there is a general love, which we owe to every man; (2) there is a particular love, which Christians owe to their fellow-believers. 2. Free from all dissimulation. 3. Fixed and fervent, invariable in its operations, and disinterested and fearless on all occasions. This sort of love was shown by John towards Christ, by the early Galatian converts towards Paul, and by Onesiphorus to the same apostle.—*F. Gilpin.*

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 10. *Love seen in Self-sacrifice.*—"And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Laying down life is the extreme expression of self-sacrifice. We may give up our time, our personal interests, our possessions, our health, in the service of others, and these are beautiful and persuasive expressions of the Christly love. But that love does not reach its perfection, its full flowering, until, in the spirit of the Lord Jesus, we are prepared to imperil, and even lay down, our lives for the saving of others. Love in self-sacrifice is seen in the home and family life. It may be that we expect it in father and mother; but where there is a fulness of family love we find it in the brothers and sisters. They will spend themselves for each other's well-being. They will imperil life for each other's sakes. And it should be thus in the family of God, among the regenerate sons, who have become, in the very highest sense, brothers. It is not often that the extreme demand is made. But seldom now does the service of Christ call for the laying down of life. Yet the persuasion of St. John will come home to us if we see that laying down life is the extreme limit, and that love can be shown in

everything that has the spirit of sacrifice and service, which comes short of the limit. Therefore Christ set before us the extreme opposite limit, telling us that love could go into the little act of sacrifice, the little trouble and inconvenience in giving a cup of water to a disciple. The essence of a love-gift is the self-denial that is in it. And there is nothing so sweetens, so beautifies, so dignifies our various human associations as the love which can deny self, in order to serve others. That is artistically, ideally, presented to us in Mary's bringing the alabaster box of precious ointment to pour upon the Saviour's feet. It was a love-gift with a woman's uttermost self-sacrifice at the heart of it. That is sublimely, divinely, presented to us, in the uttermost self-sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, as the persuasion of the "so great love" He had for us.

"For love of us He bled; for love of us He died."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 18—24.

Assuring our Hearts.—Christian assurance, the confidence that we have passed from death unto life, the restfulness of knowing that we are reconciled to God, and are in a gracious standing with Him, is not only desirable, it is even necessary, if we are to live earnest Christian lives, free from the fret and worry of a continual uncertainty. It is not "a point we should long to know"; it ought not to "cost us anxious thought." It should be a settled thing; the evidences should *be* clear and sufficient. It should *keep* a settled thing, for the evidences should be maintained, and should be effectively persuasive upon us day by day. And it must be fully understood that assurance is attainable. It is often sought in wrong ways, through some particular setting of belief, on some minor point of Christian truth, or through some definite phase of religious feeling. St. John delivers us from these mistaken ideas when he sets before us the true grounds on which our hearts may be assured before God.

I. We know that we have passed from death unto life, **if we are living a life of active charity and service to others.** Then there must have come a change over us; we must be other than our old selves. Everybody looks after his own interests first. Everybody except the man with the new life in Christ; and he looks after Christ's interests first, other people's interests next, and his own interests last. "He is not his own." "To Him to live is Christ." Or to put it in another form, the service of brotherhood is the satisfying proof of the sonship.

II. We know, **by our inner life of soul-culture.** "If our heart condemn us not, we have boldness towards God." It is true that the witness of our heart is not always reliable, and we sometimes have to appeal to God against our own hearts. We often have to when by our hearts we mean only our feelings. But understand that our soul-culture is meant, the growth, under all holy influences, of the spiritual life that has been quickened, and then we may see that our hearts can bring us assurance. Their growth in trust, joy, love, hope, says continually that we must be standing in the full saving relations.

III. We know, **through our experiences of answer to prayer.** The psalmist persuaded himself that he must be standing in the love of God, for he says, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." This is a way of regarding our answers to prayer, of which sufficient is not made. We think too much of what we *get* in such answers. We think too little of what is involved in our being answered at all. Our Lord Jesus said to His Father, "I know that Thou hearest Me always." His assurance rested on His being in such full acceptance with the Father. And if God hears us always, we also may be quite sure that we stand in full acceptance with Him.

IV. We know, **by the sense we have of God's relationship to us.** He hath "sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts," and we feel His Fatherhood. We "abide in Him," as sons do in the father. He "abides in us," as fathers do in their sons. The supreme fact concerning us is, that we are "sons of God." And the assurance that we are is found in our peculiar and characteristic apprehension of God.

V. We know, **by the inward impulse of the Spirit.** "Hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He gave us." God is never anywhere as an inactive Being. The quiescent Brahm is man's conception, not God's revelation, of Himself. Wherever He is, He is active. If He is in the soul of man, if He is in our soul, then He is active; and the movings and the impulses of the Spirit are His activity; and through those impulses we are assured that He is abiding in us. Assurances based on such grounds as these are altogether healthy, ennobling, and inspiring; and thus we may all "assure our hearts."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 18. *Profession and Practice.*—"My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth." St. John is so full of the family feeling, and uses so constantly the family figures, that we are tempted to think he must have been a family man, centre of a happy family circle. It may, however, only be that he was saturated with the idea of Christ's *Sonship*, and that gave tone and colour to every setting of truth and persuasion of duty. The term "little children" here is used in a general sense of the believers, but it suggests the simplicity, humility, and receptiveness which ought to be their characteristics. In the teaching of this text, as in so many other cases, St. John shows how he had been influenced by the teachings of his Divine Master, and did but reproduce them, bearing a certain impress from his own thought and experience. The best illustrations of our text, and of the duty enjoined in it, may be gained by showing how much our Lord made of *doing* His will—not knowing it merely, not talking about it only, but really doing it in the energetic endeavour of a life of service and charity.

I. **The connection of "doing" with "knowing" is characteristic of Christ's teachings.**—We find it constantly made the topic of His parables. In that of the "ten talents," the Master is represented as expecting, and properly expecting, that the servants who know His will shall be *doing*, and multiply their talent-trusts by wise trading. In that of the "husbandman," we find the Lord of the vineyard sending yearly for his proportion of the fruits of the husbandman's toils. In that of the "sower and the seed," the farmer looks for a return of his labour and expenditure, hoping to reap thirty, sixty, or a hundred-fold of what the soil has *done*. The "barren fig tree" is represented as reasonably cut down, because it *did nothing* in response to all the efforts made to urge it to well-doing. In the parable of the "judgment," the Divine approval is given to those who *did* something, who *did* "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction"; and the Divine indignation rests on those who knew, who could, yet who *did nothing* that was merciful and unselfish. Our Lord even exhibits this necessity for *doing* in His own life and conduct. Anticipating the life, as a twelve-year-old boy, He said, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" Of Him it could be said, "He went about doing good." At Jacob's well, though weary with His journey, He roused Himself to talk to the Samaritan woman, when the opportunity for *doing* His Father's will

was presented to Him. He could not be satisfied with only *talking* about the Father, though that was so often the duty of the hour. He could say, "My meat and My drink is to *do* the will of My Father." And at the close of His life, He could cherish no nobler thought of the life He had lived than this, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." His direct teachings bore on the same subject—the supreme importance of *doing* as well as *knowing*, *doing* as well as *feeling*. "He that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them." "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." "He that doeth the will of God . . . the same is My brother, and and sister, and mother." "Yea, blessed are they that hear the word, and do it." "Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" He told us that we can always judge things and persons by their "fruits"—that is, by what they *do*. He likened His disciples to "salt," which does something, savours and seasons; to a "light," which does something, shines in the room, and enables those present to see their work; to a "city set on a hill," which does something, acts as a beacon to guide pilgrims on their journey across the broad plain. As if to leave a last impression on those disciples, our Lord rose from His place at the last meal with them, took a towel, girded Himself, and reaching the ewer and basin, did the servant's work, pouring water over the feet of those disciples, and wiping them with the towel wherewith He was girded. And then, returning to His seat, He solemnly said, "Know ye what I have done unto you? Ye call Me Master and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you. If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye *do* them." Our Lord showed no sort of fear that *doing* would nourish a legal spirit, or tempt men to make their good works a ground of acceptance with God. His earnestness shows His sense of our graver danger. We are all much more likely to satisfy ourselves with professions, and to become only good-looking, leafy fig trees, on which, when He draweth nigh in His hunger, He can find *no figs*. Our peril is, that we may be induced to sever asunder what God has joined together, "knowing" and "doing," and so be like the foolish man who built his house upon the sand. Doing put *in place of Christ* is always wrong. Doing *for Christ's sake* is always right.

II. **The connection of "doing" with "knowing," which both Christ and His apostles taught, is still absolutely necessary.**—1. It is needed to satisfy us, and others, of the reality of our piety. For that piety is like a seed; and if it be not a worthless seed, if there be any real germ of life in that seed, it will *do* something; it will crack the soil; it will send a green blade forth; it will show itself to the light. A seed that *does* nothing is *worth* nothing. A Christian who does nothing is worth nothing before God or men. Indeed, nobody can see anything that is gained by his calling himself a Christian. Let us be quite sure of this, and let us keep the thought ever present before us—men expect to see our religion influencing our conduct. We expect this in others, and are hard upon them if we cannot find their piety in their every-day relations. We may well be reminded, that the people about us are looking at *our* doings, and will speak dishonouring things of our Lord Christ, if they cannot see His spirit in all our relationships. Solemnly let us say to one another—No creed, however correct it may be, will ever make up, before God, or before men, for unsubdued tempers, unrestrained habits, tyranny at home, offences given abroad, self-indulgences, or neglect of the sick whom we might visit, the poor whom we might feed, or the naked whom we might clothe. Search and see what personal satisfactions you can gain as you compare

your "knowing" with your "doing," your "profession" with your "practice." Inquire and see whether there is abroad, among those whom you have to do with day by day, an impression which leads them to say concerning you, "Well reported of for good works." Would the widows and the poor folk come about your house, if you lay dead, showing the coats and garments which you made, as they came crowding round the house of Dorcas, that early Christian woman, who was full of good works and alms-deeds that she did? 2. It is necessary in order to prove the truth of Christianity itself. This system of religion makes marvellous pretensions. It is the last and highest revelation of God to men: it is the supreme remedy for the deepest human sorrows. It is God's own sunshine to bring spring-time life to an earth lying cold and dead in the long winter of sin. But how shall it support the pretensions? Only by living examples of its power—only as the men and women who profess to have received the life in Christ *do something*. Experiment tests everything. Constantly fresh experiments are needed. Select a few professing Christians. See what they are doing. Do not fear to apply the test—judge Christianity *by its fruits*. In every age it has stood this test. When all the great arguments and evidences have wearied us, we may say—See what Christianity has done. The spirit-possessed, the blind, the lame, the drunkard, the strong-tempered, the selfish, all have been changed; and the charity of the world is to-day in the hands of those who are constrained by the love of Christ. If you would prove to all around you the truth of Christianity, use argument and evidence with all wisdom, as far as ever you can; but this, above everything else, we would say to you—Show men what it can *do*. Men may resist eloquence; they may even refute reasoning; they may deny your evidences; but they cannot resist the power of goodness. It is like leaven, and, unbeknown, it leavens. It is like the morning light. It peeps above the eastern ridge, flinging great lines of glory up the sky. The night darkness does not like it, but it must feel it. That darkness will have to fly; for the morning light will grow in power until it makes the shadowless noonday.

Vers. 22, 23. *Keeping God's Commandments.*—This position taken by St. John is but putting in Christian form the universal condition on which Divine favour must rest. It is declared in the most general way that "the Lord is far from the wicked, but He heareth the prayer of the righteous" (Prov. xv. 29). And in his gospel St. John represents the people as arguing about Christ on the basis of commonly received principles and opinions: "We know that God heareth not sinners: but if a man be a worshipper of God, *and do His will* [keep His commandments], him He heareth" (John ix. 31).

I. **Keeping commandments may be regarded as acts of obedience.** It is seldom seen with sufficient clearness that moral training, for the child or the child-nation, must necessarily begin with formal acts of obedience. The child must do what it is told to do. Israel must obey the elaborate ten laws of Sinai in the actual details of every-day life and relationship. And even Christian life properly begins in formal acts of obedience.

II. **Keeping commandments may be regarded as the expression of sonship.**—The true child in a home never *tries* to obey; he obeys without trying, because obedience is the natural and proper spirit of sonship. Some alien force must be influencing a child if he does not obey. Let a man be born of God, his new life will certainly express itself in keeping God's commandments.

III. **Keeping commandments may be tested by the obedience of two commandments** (ver. 23).—1. Our belief in the *Son*-name of Jesus. There

is no point of persuasion if St. John is assumed to be referring to saving faith in Christ, or to faith in Him as Messiah. It must never be lost from view that he is writing to professing Christians, to those who have the life in Christ. He is writing to them about the *higher life*. What Christians are called by God to do is to believe in the *Sonship* of Christ, in Him as the *Son of God*, and in all that such belief involves concerning the actual Fatherly relations of God. If this be the test commandment, how sinful is the hesitation of Christians to receive the full revelation of the Sonship! 2. Our love for those who are our brothers because they are with us sons, through the Son-name of Jesus.

Ver. 24. *The Spirit's Inward Witness.*—"And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He gave us." There are two witnesses to our standing before God, to our sonship in Christ with the eternal Father. There is the witness of our own spirit, and there is the witness of the Holy Ghost; but the testimony of the Holy Ghost is an inward witness, given through the spirit of the man.

I. **The witness of our own spirit to our having the Father, and being sons.**—It may be asked, Whence comes the assurance of our sonship *to our human parents*? Whence that spirit of restfulness and satisfaction in our relationship which we felt so strongly when we dwelt at home, and which we have even now, though far away from home, or though even the old home has been broken up, and those who made it so dear have passed away? There is a witness of our own spirit. That spirit tells us it holds cherished memories of home life and joys. Our spirit reminds us that, when utterly helpless, a mother's bosom was our resting-place; broken rest was thought but little of by her; daily trouble seemed no weight to her, for the greatness of the mother-love she bore us. Our spirit tells us that the love which testified itself in such ways then has been a growing love, ever finding new, tender, and wonderful ways of expression. The testimony of our own spirit about the past is one great assurance of our sonship. But the inward witness tells of more than this; it speaks of our own *views*, *ideas*, *affections*, and *emotions*. Our spirit bids us see, that towards our father we feel a kind of respect and reverence, and towards our mother we have affections and emotions, which we need some new, and almost heaven-born, word to express. Our spirit testifies to a deference to their opinion, a desire to please them, a willingness to obey them, and a confidence in them, which is the most certain inward witness of our sonship. We are quite satisfied and happy; it is the testimony of our own spirit that we are the children of these parents, and that we are preserving our relationship. So we might ask, What is our assurance that we are children of this beloved England? Do we need to appeal to Magna Charta? or must we anxiously collect and examine the birth, marriage, and death certificates of our ancestry? Surely not. We are abundantly satisfied with the testimony of our own spirit that we have the English thought, and the English ways and habits; and that, in the temper of the child, we are obeying England's laws, and glorying in her dignities and privileges. This seems to be very plain. And in this way there is a testimony of our own spirit to the reality of *sonship with God*. Inquire of your own spirit. Is there not cherished in it a memory, a thought—cherished in its very holiest place—of the wonderful love of God in Christ to you: a memory of a great gift, the offering of saving love and pity, once made for you? Does not your spirit tell you it has a most hallowed, inner shrine, and in that shrine you keep the memory of that ever-blessed One, whose beautiful life of heavenly, divine charities closed so sadly, so shamefully, in a death that won life and heaven for you? Does not your spirit tell how that shrine

has been opened in the hours of silent meditation, and sweetest odours of infinite love have streamed forth, making fragrant all the temple of your soul? Does not your spirit tell that the memory and the thought of Christ exercise continual power upon you, swaying your nature as with the might of some great principle? If then your spirit has such things as these to tell you, may you not be sure that this is like the child's memory of parental love?—it is the pledge of your sonship; it is the witness of your own spirit that you are the child of God. But beyond this witness of a cherished memory, our spirit gives testimony to our sonship with God in our views, feelings, dispositions, and in the spirit and conduct of our life. Our spirit renders witness to us of the reality of the great spiritual change that has been wrought in us. Our hearts will tell us whether we are the same now that we were some ten or twenty years ago, or it may be even a few months since. As we set our old life, in its principle and in its spirit, over against our present life, in its principle and in its spirit, we are sensible of a most decided contrast, which cannot possibly be explained by the mere fact of our having grown older. As we compare the things which we loved and sought in those old days with the things we are loving and seeking now, we say—Our present life is not indeed what we would have it to be; still it is different, most manifestly different. "We were sometime darkness, now are we light in the Lord." Our own spirit testifies within us to the change. Our own spirit witnesses also to a new view of God, and of the relation in which we stand to Him. Our own spirit witnesses to our thinking differently now of goodness and of holiness. Goodness was the highest conception we once could reach, and we meant by it, ordering our life within certain prescribed limits. That has given place to a conception of the claims of holiness; by which we mean a life in conformity with the will of God—a life informed and possessed with the spirit of allegiance, devotion, and love to Him.

II. **The witness of the Holy Spirit to our sonship with God.**—That Spirit works through the testimony that is given by our spirit. The Holy Ghost does not give oral testimony; He does not speak even by "a still small voice," caught only by the attentive ear. He does not come with observation, in extraordinary and overwhelming manifestation. He comes as a silent, secret, inward, Divine force of life, strengthening and renewing those who are good and pure in heart and purpose; He comes purifying, perfecting, guiding the witness of our own spirit. In two ways we may recognise the concurring witness of the Holy Spirit and our spirit. We, with our whole powers of spirit, seek to know the mind and will of God, as they have been revealed to us in His word. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to gain true apprehensions, and to lay personal hold of the truths and promises it contains. He leads into all truth. And we, with our whole power of spirit, seek to cherish all godly emotions, and, in bringing forth good fruit, to live the godly life. It is the Holy Spirit who quickens those emotions, and all the fruits we can produce are but varieties of the "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, and patience," which we know are the immediate fruits of the Spirit. We might with truth say, "I live, yet not I, the Holy Ghost liveth in me." It is the recognition of this inner life, the consciousness of this Divine indwelling, which brings rest and peace, and the impulse to nobler things, to the Christian.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1. *The Privilege of Sonship.*—When the Danish missionaries in India appointed some of their Indian converts to translate a catechism, in which it was mentioned as the privilege of Christians to become the sons of God, one of the translators, startled at so bold a saying, as he thought it, said, "It is too much; let me rather render it, 'They shall be permitted to kiss His feet.'"

Ver. 2. *Spiritual Development imperfect now.*—If you take a seed that has ripened in Nova Zembla, and bring it into the tropics and plant it, it will not be what it would have been in Nova Zembla, with a short growing season and a scanty supply of food. It will have, with a long summer and an abundant supply, a growth to which no one would suspect it could attain who had only seen it grow in the frigid zones. Many things that are shrubs in the frigid zones, are high, waving, century trees in the tropics. And so men in this life are in conditions which, though fitted to develop the earlier stages of human growth, are not fitted to develop the full estate of that idea which God has expressed in the creation of man.—*H. W. Beecher.*

Ver. 7. *Christian Righteousness.*—Do not fancy that Christian righteousness is different from ordinary "goodness," except as being broader and deeper, more thoroughgoing, more imperative. The precepts of the one, like some rock-hewn inscriptions by forgotten kings, are weathered and indistinct, often illegible, often misread, often neglected. The other is written in living characters in a perfect life.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

Ver. 16. *Laying down Life for the sake of Another.*—Two men were working together in a mine, and having prepared to blast the rock, and laid the train, the latter became by accident ignited. In a few moments a tremendous explosion they knew was inevitable, and the rock must be rent in a thousand pieces. On perceiving their danger, they both leaped into the bucket, and called to the man on the surface to draw them up. He endeavoured to do so, but his arm was found too feeble to raise the bucket while both the men were in it. What was to be done? The burning fuse, which could not be extinguished, was now within a few feet of the powder; a moment or two, and the explosion must take place. At this awful crisis, one of the men, addressing the other, said, "You shall live, and I will die; for you are an impenitent sinner, and if you now die your soul will be lost; but if I die, I know that, by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, I shall be taken to Himself." And so saying, without waiting for a reply, he leaped out of the bucket, and prayerfully awaited the result. On the other reaching the surface, he bent over the shaft to ascertain the fate of his companion. At this moment a terrific explosion was heard; a portion of the rock was thrown up, and smote him on the forehead, leaving an indelible mark to remind him of his danger and deliverance. But the man of God, when they came to search for him, was found arched over by the fragments of broken rock in the mine, uninjured and rejoicing in the Lord. This magnanimous miner exhibited in this act an amount of disinterested love and charity which has seldom been equalled, and which is never found but in connection with the love of Christ.—*R. Young.*

Self-sacrifice: the Pilot of the "Rothesay."—This vessel was wrecked in a cyclone in the Indian Ocean. The pilot, Paul Elson, collected a few volunteers, and rigged a raft. Thirteen only of the crew got on her; the rest were frantic with terror—some praying, others drunk, others raving, others lashed inextricably to the sinking vessel. Elson was the last to leave the ship; leaping overboard, he swam to the raft, cut the hawser that held her, and constituted himself by inherent right her sole officer. Within an hour the doomed vessel heeled, lurched heavily, and went down head first. All that day and all that night the raft drifted, heavy seas breaking over her. "We were up to our necks in water," says the man who tells the tale, "for she floated low." All that night, nevertheless, Elson, who was a powerful swimmer, swam round and round the raft, lashing her together and strengthening her as best he could. Ever and anon the furious breakers washed a man off. And then would the brave pilot who had not only the heart but the strength of a gaint, strike out towards him and carry the drowning wretch back. But at last it became apparent that the raft must be broken up, and that a second and smaller raft must be constructed to relieve the other. This, too, the pilot effected almost single-handed. The large raft floated away into the night; Elson and three other men took to the smaller; while on the other drifted away a native boy, Paul Elson's servant, of whom hitherto, in the midst of all his terrible toil, the brave pilot had never once lost sight. "He kept near him; he tended him as a mother would tend her child; he gave him our last supply of drinkable water." The vessel had sunk on the 29th of July; it was now the 2nd of August. The raft was drifting under a raging tropical

sun; for three days there had been no food or water; worse than this, the frail support itself began to break up, and swimming about in a heavy surf, Paul Elson became much exhausted. The end of course could not now be far off. First one of the men was washed away, and then another, until Elson himself and the Scotchman who tells the story were the sole survivors. "'Pilot,' said I"—so the narrative runs—"'we must fight it through!' 'Oh, Fraser!' answered he, 'I can't hold out any longer.' . . . Then a heavy sea broke upon us, and knocked him off. I found it impossible to hang on, and was forced to let him go." And so the story ends. The body of Pilot Elson, worn out by his incessant labours, floats away into the great deep, there to lie till the sea shall give up its dead.—*Daily Telegraph.*

CHAPTER IV.

LOVE FINDS THE TRUTH; FEAR TAKES UP WITH ERROR.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

In the first three verses the apostle guards his readers against being misled by false pretensions to the possession of the Spirit (see chap. ii. 24).

Ver. 1. **Beloved.**—Indicating the affectionate relations in which St. John and his disciples stood. **Believe not.**—Do not be carried away by loud professions. In all ages of the Church persons have arisen who claimed to possess supernatural powers, or to have received special revelations. St. John does not say that they all are insincere and time-serving; but he reminds us that they *may be*, and that their claims must always be submitted to careful examination and testing. They may be the delusions of fanatical enthusiasts; they may be the lies of fanatical impostors. **Spirit.**—That is, persons who pretend to have a spirit. Illustrate by Acts viii. 9, xvi. 16, xxi. 9. **Try the spirits.**—R.V. *prove.* He bids them exercise the χάρισμα of διακρίσεις πνευματων (1 Cor. xii. 4: see also 1 Cor. x. 15, xi. 13, xii. 10; Eph. v. 10; 1 Thess. v. 21). **False prophets.**—Teachers, not foretellers. Men who pretend to have received a special revelation, which is out of harmony with that received through Christ and His apostles. Under the old dispensation prophets were to be tested by "the law and the testimony. If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no truth in them" (Isa. viii. 20). Under the new dispensation all claimants to Divine inspiration must submit to be tested by the inspired words of Christ and His apostles. Whatever proposes to supersede the revelation given us, and whatever is out of harmony with that revelation, must be wrong and untrustworthy. **Gone out.**—Generally, are spread abroad. It is not meant that they had all once been Christian disciples. Some may have been, perhaps some of the most mischievous ones.

Ver. 2. **Know ye.**—Prefer indicative "ye know." **Spirit of God.**—That is, a spirit which has been given by God. A man may *assume* to have the Spirit; a man may *have* the Spirit: you will know which it is if you estimate aright what the spirit moves the man to say and do. St. John suggests one test as specially applicable to the delusions of his own age. **Come in the flesh.**—The strongest way of asserting the veritable humanity of Christ. It is important to notice that the heretics of the later apostolic age did not deny the *Divinity*, but the *humanity*, of Christ. See the Cerinthian and Docetic doctrines. **That spirit of antichrist.**—There is no word answering to *spirit* in the original, but it is necessary to the sense of the passage. Observe that the antichrist is not a person, but a sentiment, influence, point and tone of teaching. The essence of apostolic teaching is *loyalty to Christ*; the essence of the teaching of deceiving or self-deceived prophets was independence of Christ, or antagonism to Him. If any man wants to improve upon Christ, or teach otherwise than He did, we cannot be wrong in calling him antichrist. And so there are "many antichrists." **Should come.**—It cometh.

Ver. 4. **Little children.**—As before, conceiving disciples as in the immature, training stage, and therefore specially exposed to evil influences. **He that is in you.**—The Holy Spirit. **In the world.**—The spirit of self, or the devil.

Ver. 6. **Knoweth God.**—Compare John xvii. 3. The knowing is that which comes by personal experience, not by merely mental effort. Let a man stand in right relations with God, that man will have right discernment of God's servants, and be ever ready to receive their messages. **Spirit of truth.**—Not only the true spirit, but the spirit whose range is truth. **Spirit of error.**—Not only the false spirit, but the spirit whose range is error.

Ver. 7.—The previous verses are in some sense an "aside." The apostle now resumes his proper theme. His main truth is this—Love is the mark of the children of God, who is love. Love to God is a delusion if it does not find expression in love toward one another as brethren. And love of the brethren is a sure test of our having the Spirit of God, for the spirit of antichrist is a self-seeking and self-serving spirit. "Just as it severs the Divine from the human in Christ, so it severs Divine love from human conduct in man." Love to one another may be recognised as a gift of the Spirit of God, an "effluence from the very being of God." **Born.**—Better, "begotten." **Knoweth God.**—As one only can know by sharing the same nature.

Ver. 8. **Knoweth not.**—Better, "can never have known"; "hath never known." **God is love.**—1 John i. 5. Not God loves, which is true, but far short of the truth that John expresses. The very essence of God is His going outside Himself, and living in others, in the service of others.

Ver. 9. **Manifested.**—Jesus manifests what God *is*, and what God *does*. St. John here speaks of what God *does*. R.V. renders, "Herein was the love of God manifested in us," or "in our case." "Manifested" is one of St. John's favourite words. It means, "became such that it could be known or apprehended by man." We see the love in a *gift* which the love has made. **Only begotten.**—Though we too are begotten of God, there must be a sense in which Christ's relationship is unique, and this is expressed by the term "only begotten." μονογενής as applied to Christ is St. John's peculiar term. **Live through Him.**—"Enjoy a blessed fellowship with God, being delivered from that state of estrangement and alienation which is virtually death." *Live* applies to the life of the soul, which *is* the man.

Ver. 10. **Propitiation.**—ἱλασμόν (1 John ii. 2, and not elsewhere in the New Testament). For the idea St. John had, see the notes on the previous passage.

Ver. 12. **Seen God.**—"We cannot contemplate the incomprehensible essence of the Deity by a direct gaze." God can be seen only in Christ (John i. 18). **His love is perfected.**—*I.e.* attains just what it wants to attain. Let that love of God which we apprehend in Christ work its full work, and it will be sure to make us "love the brethren."

Ver. 13. **Of His Spirit.**—Contrasted with those mentioned in the early verses, who professed to have the Spirit, but whose self-seeking tone, and self-glorifying teachings, plainly showed that it was not the Spirit of God.

Ver. 15. **Son of God.**—St. John was jealous of the double truth of the person of Jesus—His Divinity and His humanity.

Ver. 17. **Made perfect.**—Or reaches its purpose and end. The sign of its being fully developed in us will be the removal of fear in relation to the "day of judgment." We shall no more fear it than Jesus did. Enter into *sonship*, and all thought of judgment day passes away from us. Children are not afraid of their father.

Vers. 20, 21.—A recapitulation, in a vivid form, of the truth and the duty contained in vers. 10, 11. The love of our neighbour cannot be separated from the love of God, of which it is a distinguishing and essential mark. Sight is the great provocative of love. The difficulty of our loving God as an unseen being is met by the manifestation of God in His Son. **This commandment.**—Matt. xxii. 37-39.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—6.

Come in the Flesh—the True man.—Trench says, "Jesus took the name Son of Man, as He who alone realised the idea of man." *Philo* calls the Logos, ὁ ἀληθινὸς ἄνθρωπος. It is often shown that the purpose Christ had in view in coming to our world was to reveal the Father; to correct the mistakes into which men had fallen respecting the Divine Being; to convince us that He is no impassive Being, no mere embodiment of abstract justice or impersonation of law, but the Divine Father of spirits. Our Lord Jesus came into this world with one supreme aim—to save us by making the Father-God lovely to us, and lovable by us. But we should give heed to another great meaning and purpose of our Lord's life on the earth. It was designed to be a revelation of humanity to men—of man to himself. The rays of light shine out from Christ both upwards, and all around. Upwards they pierce to some extent the darkness in which Deity is hidden from mortal eyes. All around they shine into our hearts, and dispel the mistakes that hide our true selves from our own view. Christ is Emmanuel, God and man; God with us, in our own flesh and blood. We cannot be said adequately to know Jesus Christ until we have seen the God that

is in Him, and also the man that is in Him. He is come *in the flesh.* He is the second Adam. He represents ideal humanity, man as God thought him when He gave him breath and being. Over the old Grecian temple they put the words, "Know thyself." An easy command to give, a most difficult command to obey. And that for one sufficient reason—the true standard of humanity is lost, and we have no one with whom we may safely compare ourselves. To know a picture, or a statue, or a building, we must judge it by the standard; and there are world-standards. But when we would know ourselves, where is our standard? If it ever was here amongst men, it is lost now, and has been lost for ages. That the ideal of humanity is lost is shown in the conceptions alike of old and of modern poets. They declare, in their word-pictures, the universal conviction that there was once a Golden Age. But they all mourn over it as a past and lost time. They do but tell us the Bible story of Eden—its innocency, its grace, its possibilities, and then its sin, its shame, and its desolation. Men have been seeking vainly for the true standard through all the ages since Eden was lost. God purposed, when He saw that the fitting time had come, to show men a man once again, a perfect, ideal, standard man. The fulness of time came, and He sent forth His Son "made of a woman, made under the law," veritable partaker of our flesh and blood. There is the only perfect flower of manhood that has ever unfolded out of the root of humanity. How soon, and how easily, men can lose fitting and worthy conceptions of God! Give to any nation comparatively clear light on the nature and character and relations of God, and in a generation or two we shall find that the light is faded, and the image is blurred. Men began to worship the sun as if it were the brightness of God; then they thought of the nobler beasts of the earth as images of Him; presently they made symbols of reptiles and creeping things; and at last sunk to making idols which expressed, in their forms and features, the vilest human passions. But men have proved quite as ready to lose the truth about themselves. Indeed, if men will not keep the truth about God, they shall not keep the truth about anything else—at least about anything moral. How men sunk from the standard of humanity St. Paul has described in Rom. i. Then God sent forth His Son, the ideal man, the standard man. Other men, lost in their corruptions, shall see amongst them the true man, Christ Jesus. Looking upon Him men know themselves, and are humbled to find how low they have sunk from what they ought to be. Since Jesus came to the world there have been no great men, no standard men. All fall below His excellence. But that life Jesus lived was truly human. There are some things in which we may become true men like Christ.

I. **It is possible for man to enjoy consciously near and happy fellowship with God, as Jesus did.**—Into the Divine presence He seemed to be always easily going. He breathed in the Divine atmosphere. Carrying the thought of God always with Him, every place became a holy place, all work became holy work, all days holy days. His humanity was no hindrance to Him; it made no mists or cloud-shadows between Him and God. And it is light and hope for us thus to see, in Christ, that the thing which shuts us out from God is not our being men, but our being sinners. Christ was a man, but not a sinner, and so the holy place of communion was to Him as a home. And as we look on Christ, come in the flesh, we see the work of life set before us. We must be wholly freed from sin, and then God Himself shall become the dear love, and near friend, and cherished home of our soul.

II. **It is possible for man to reach the abiding conquest of sin—of sin both without him and within.**—Up to the time of Christ, that possibility was never known, it could never be realised. Man toiled on under the slavery of sin. There had never been seen such a thing as a man free from sin, a man proved

through all the temptations of a human life to be mightier than evil. Men had never seen one human tree without some traces of the decaying worm; never seen the building of one human life without some bulgings and disfigurings of failure; never seen one human face without the care-look of a wounded conscience. So men might, with some show of reason, have said, "Sin is a part of humanity; we cannot be rid of it." But in saying that, man would have consummated his ruin; he would have, as it were, reached out his hand to the tree of life, and stamped immortality upon his sin. God would not let him do that. God would guard the tree of life with a flaming sword. God would send His Son into the world as a man without sin, to break the hopeless sameness of the past—as a *man*, surrounded with evil, attacked by temptations, and yet able to say, "Who convicteth Me of sin?" No stain upon the life, no pollution on the soul, one with men, separate from sinners,—there is hope for us in that. Sin is not man. Sin is not any necessary part of man. Sin may be put away from man. It is a fact now—a man has stood and walked and worked, in a world full of sin, with unsoiled garments, and unspotted soul, always clothed in pure white garments. Man has proved to be mightier than sin. It can no longer raise its head and boast, as if it were an unconquered and unconquerable foe. It is a beaten foe. Christ has beaten it. The shame and weakness of defeat lie on sin now. And our manhood, with God's help, may renew the victory.

III. **It is possible for men to reach the cherished spirit, and the abiding expression, of self-sacrifice.**—If we know ourselves, we know this, that outward enemies are easily mastered, but the inward foe of self only with extreme difficulty. But the most marked feature in the life of Christ is His self-sacrifice. He was among us as one that serveth. But on what principle is all this possible to us, to humanity? The success of Christ was not due to any latent force which is in humanity itself, and which Christ alone succeeded in developing. Humanity has no independent energies. As a created thing it is a necessarily dependent thing. It has trailed on the ground, and soiled its flowers, because it tried to grow alone. In the forests of Madagascar may be seen a beautiful climbing-plant, twining itself about the larger trunks and branches, and singing out its strength in bright green leaves, and laughing out its gladness in large, abundant, and exquisite white flowers. It is so strong and so beautiful because it clasps the strong, twines about the strong, and drinks up ever new life from the strong. And so humanity is strong *in God*, holding a living dependence on Him, and a happy reliance on Him. The triumph which Christ gained was the result of a most near union between the Divine and the human, the man and God. The secret of His life is this—in Him the Spirit of God dwelt above measure. He was, in some wonderful way, God and man. At first that dashes down all our hopes. Then He is altogether other than we are. But if Christ won so perfect a life by having the Spirit *above* measure, we may win towards it by having the Spirit *in* measure. We can receive the Holy Ghost, and become temples of the Holy Ghost; in some degree at least, like Christ—men having God with them.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 1. *The Trial of Spiritual Claims by Spiritual Men.*—"Prove the spirits." We have to take full account of the fact that error—false or imperfect presentation of truth—has a similar mission in the sphere of religious thought to that of affliction in the sphere of religious relations. There always has been in the Church testing, tempting, disciplining error, just as there always has been in the Christian experience testing, tempting, disci-

plining affliction. Had there been no error, the truth would neither have been preserved effective, nor would it have been elaborated, defined, or adapted. So many of the settings of Christian truth, in which the Church now rejoices, are the direct products of times of conflict. Look along the level lines, and error seems to be an unmitigated evil. But look down on it from above, see it with some fitting idea of the Divine overruling, and it is but one of the dark angels that are about the Father's business; it is but as the emery that polishes the sword of truth. If we keep in thought a comparison between "errors" and "afflictions," we may learn how to deal effectually and wisely with errors. Afflictions are overwhelming woes until their inmost mystery is opened, as it only can be opened, by the *spiritually-minded man*. And that is equally true of error. That it *is error* is always detected by the spiritually-minded man, because he can test every setting of truth by two infallible tests: 1. By the sense of its harmony with God, which in Him is most keen. 2. By the tendency of it to work towards righteousness; and of this the spiritual man has a quickened and cultured discernment. The error never lies in any particular form of words by which a side or aspect of truth is expressed. Error lies in the motive that shapes the setting, and in the moral or immoral influence which the setting may exert.

Vers. 2, 3. *The Doctrine of Christ's Humanity a Test Doctrine.*—We live in times when the doctrine of Christ's Divinity is usually made the test doctrine, and when much anxiety is felt lest the doctrine of Christ's humanity should gain an exaggerated place, and an extravagant, and therefore mischievous, setting. In the early Church, the Divinity of Jesus seems to have been fully recognised. The Arian conflicts belong to a much later age. The union of the Divine and human in Christ is of necessity a mystery that can never gain precise statement in any limited, imperfect, and variable human language. But then that can with equal truth be said of the union of soul and body in man. Men will have a right to demand proof of the Divinity of Christ, when they have found it reasonable to demand proof of the existence of the soul. And it will be found that the arguments on which rest our belief in the one are of the same kind as those on which rest our belief in the other. In the early Church the test of orthodoxy was belief in the veritableness of Christ's humanity, His real body of flesh and blood. The error of that day was a subtle distinction between a Divine Being and a human body which that Divine Being temporarily used. This made the "Man Christ Jesus" an unreal, unnatural Being—not such a man as we are; and if not, He could be no proper representative of us, to be sacrificed for us. But the error took even a more subtle form. Men taught that what seemed a human body, and could indeed be seen and touched, was in fact no body at all, but only such an appearance of a body as angels had taken for their earth-ministries in Old Testament times. Neither of these can possibly be consistent with the Christian revelation, which declares that Jesus is come *in the flesh*, and so is a *bonâ-fide* man, with body, soul, and spirit like every other man; and so able to be the race representative and Saviour.

Ver. 3. *Spirit of Antichrist.*—Man after man, rich in gifts, endowed often with far larger and nobler faculties than the people that oppose him, with indomitable perseverance, a martyr to his error, sets himself up against the truth that is sphered in Jesus Christ; and the great Divine message simply goes on its way, and all the battlement and noise is like so many bats flying against a light, or the wild sea-birds that come sweeping up in the tempest and the night, against the hospitable Pharos that is upon the rock, and

smite themselves dead against it.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

Ver. 4. *The True Secret of the Mastery of Error.*—"Because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." *Canon Liddon* says: "St. John constantly teaches that the Christian's work in this state of probation is to 'conquer the world.' It is, in other words, to fight successfully against that view of life which ignores God, against that complex system of attractive moral evil and specious intellectual falsehood which is organised and marshalled by the great enemy of God, and which permeates and inspires non-Christianised society." To be "of God" implies that God is *in us*; dwelling in us as the spiritual presence and power of the Holy Ghost. So our Lord promised and assured His disciples (John xiv. 16, 17, 23). If we may suggest a distinction between our apprehensions of the presences with us of the Son and of the Spirit, we may say—the living Christ is God with us in order that He may be *for* us; the Holy Ghost is God with us in order that He may be *in* us, ever at the springs of thought, and feeling, and motive, and action. Then we can fill St. John's assertion in this text with a double meaning, and so assure our hearts that we have all-sufficing strength unto ever-renewed victory over all forms of moral evil.

I. **God with us as the living Christ is greater than all the evil forces that may seek to injure us.**—In some such sense as the human Christ was with His apostles, defending, preserving, guiding them—with them in the sphere of their circumstances, shaping, controlling, overruling them, so as to secure for His disciples triumph over all evil—the living Christ is with His people now, with His Church now, "walking amid the candlesticks," working the safety of His people and His Church, by His control of all their circumstances. He is *for* them as a living Helper and Friend; for them in the exertion of Divine power.

II. **God with us as the Holy Ghost is greater than all the subtle influences that can act upon us.**—What the Holy Ghost was in the early Church as defence against error, taking the most subtle forms against the malign influence of subtle men, spirits, antichrist, that the Holy Spirit is in every age to the believer—the absolutely secure defence against intellectual and moral evil, as Divine wisdom and strength abiding *in* us.

Ver. 6. *All inspired by God will be in Essential Harmony.*—"He that knoweth God heareth us." The more careful and strict, the more critical, examination of Holy Scripture has brought to view, in a very impressive way, the fact that wherever there is a Divine inspiration there is essential harmony with all other Divine inspiration. Of this we are now so well assured, that we are even prepared to say this—if there is any inspiration of God outside the Scriptures, then that inspiration will certainly be found in essential harmony with all that is in them. But the statements properly occasion surprise and stimulate thought. The Scriptures represent different ages, different types of mind, different social and intellectual conditions; and in the Scriptures is found an ever-refreshing variety in the settings and shapings of truth; and yet take any vital, primary, fundamental verity concerning God, or man, or the relations between God and man, and it is not possible to find anything out of the general harmony. The inspired word of God never contradicts itself. St. John says that what is true of the inspired word is also true of the inspired man. Assume that God is in the teacher, inspiring his words; then it is certain that whenever God is in the hearer, inspiring him for hearing, he will receive the message which the inspired teacher delivers. Safety against the false teacher, the uninspired teacher, is found in the hearer being inspired for hearing. Such an one is in no moral danger. He cannot live and thrive

on the uninspired teaching. He finds himself out of harmony with it. But his inspiration brings him into full harmony with everything that is also inspired. It is of course to be understood that the term "inspiration" is here used, not of a precise and limited definition of inspiration, such as may be characteristic of a particular school of thought, but of that general experience of Divine inspiration, which the believer knows as the moving, impelling, directing, restraining influence of the Holy Ghost that dwelleth in him. Inspiration is the proper word for the inward work of God the Holy Ghost.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—14.

The Fatherly Love carries with it Brotherly Love.—What may possibly have been in St. John's mind is the error of assuming a difference between the love that we have for God and the love that we have one for another. And that is an error which is often secretly cherished, though it gains no open expression, and would indeed be ashamed to show itself to the light. How often our feeling is this—"We cannot be expected to love other people just as we love God." But it may properly be maintained that there can be no varieties in *love*. There can be differences in quality and degree, but not in kind. There must be relation to its object, but love can never be anything but just itself. Whether it go out to God, or go out to our brother, it is just the same thing—*love*. Even as in family life, there can be nothing but just the family love. It goes out to the father and mother, or to the brothers and sisters, using a variety of signs and expressions, but it can never be anything but itself; and it is not itself if it is limited to the parents, or limited to the brothers. And St. John affirms that love is not love when it is set only upon God the Father, and restrained from our fellow-men, our brothers. "He that loveth not knoweth not God." The point of connection in St. John's mind between this and the preceding section may be found in the fact that false doctrine is always self-centred, self-serving, and consequently tends to separate men from their fellows. You cannot love your fellows, if you only want to make a gain of them. False teachers boasted much about love to God, but they wholly failed under the test of love to men. *Dr. Plummer* says: "The antichristian spirit is a selfish one; it makes self, *i.e.* one's own intellect and one's own interest, the measure of all things. Just as it severs the Divine from the human in Christ, so it severs Divine love from human conduct in man. 'Beloved, let us do far otherwise. Let us love one another.' For the third and last time in this epistle the apostle introduces the subject of brotherly love. 1. It was introduced as a consequence and sign of walking in the light (ii. 7-11). Next, 2, it was introduced as a special form of righteousness and mark of God's children (iii. 10-18). 3. Here it appears as a gift of the Spirit of God, a contrast to the antichristian spirit, and above all as an effluence from the very being of God." From a careful examination of the verses we gather, that St. John is endeavouring to impress the truth that profession of love can be of no avail, it must find fitting and adequate expression in the relations of every-day life. Even God's love must be *manifested*, in order to be in any sense an effective power on men.

I. **Abstract love in God is ineffective.**—"God is love." There the truth stands. It is full and clear to view. It is sublime, but it is unattainable. If that be all, if we only know some absolute and abstract fact concerning the intimate nature of God, then it is really nothing to us. It is high; we cannot attain unto it. If the philosophers can do something with it, we commonplace, every-day men and women cannot.

II. **Manifested love is persuasion and power** (vers. 9, 10).—God's love has found expression in the most persuasive of all ways—by a gift, and a gift which involved an extreme self-sacrifice; and moreover by a gift which so precisely meets our needs that it carries the persuasion of His love right into our hearts. (Propitiation for our sins.) We feel the love *through the manifestation and expression*, and we can feel it in no other way.

III. **Sentimental love in man is worthless, and even mischievous.**—This is really the point which St. John is enforcing. (Compare Jas. ii. 14-16.) Characteristic of uninspired teaching is fine sentiment about society and brotherhood; and men can be easily carried away by exaggerated and helpless sentiment. They can think themselves good because they have uttered good-sounding phrases.

IV. **Practical love towards man alone honours God, and does God's work.**—To express this in the line of St. John's thoughts. The love must be manifested: it must find its gift; and its gift must carry its self-sacrifice unto the uttermost.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 7. *To love is the Sign of the New Birth.*—"And every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God." There is physical or natural life; there is moral life; and there is spiritual or Divine life. The sign of physical life is *movement*. There is a sign indicating the existence of a moral being, a being who can come into relations with other beings. There is a sign of moral life. It is the power to *love*, to go outside oneself and take on our own heart the concern of another. And there is a sign of the yet higher, spiritual life; and since that life is kin with the moral life the sign is the same for it. It is love; but it is the going outside ourselves to lose ourselves in God. You may know that a man is begotten to the higher, spiritual, Divine life, if you can see that the supreme, the master principle and persuasion of his life is *love to God*. And it may further be said that the love gauges the life. The fuller the life, the intenser the love, the more ennobling and sanctifying the power of the love.

Love implies Insight of the Highest Spiritual Things.—"And knoweth God." Knowing depends on two things—on the thing known, and on the person knowing. We know different things in different ways. Things are different to different persons. There is a particular way in which God alone can be known, and in which alone high, spiritual things can be known. They cannot be known by any effort of the intellect alone. And the intellect by itself is not the man. They can be known only through the affections, and *their* use of the intellectual powers. God, and everything kin with Him, is "spiritually discerned." And it is not everybody who can know God; only the man whose affections, being spiritually quickened, in a natural way turn to God, and are fully open and receptive to the manifestations and evidences of Himself that God may be pleased to give.

Born of God.—Theologians and others have, I think, assumed that the doctrine of the birth from above is more inscrutably mysterious than it is, and have therefore unwarrantably obscured Christ's truth. It is, I admit, under any view of it, a "great mystery of godliness"; yet it is not altogether without its parallel in every-day life. Every good son is born again. A child is first, by no choice of his own, born into the family of a good man. So far he is a son by nature only; he

may grow up to be dissatisfied with his father's mode of life, and with the law of his father's house. He may also adopt a course of action so widely divergent from the father's, that the natural bond between them shall serve only to reveal the vast and widening gulf of character that separates them, and similarity of feature shall only serve to give painful emphasis to the utter dissimilarity of disposition. The son is now a son in form only—in all things else a foreigner. To become truly a son he must be born again—must of his own choice accept as his father the parent Nature gave him, and must by his own love and conduct make the house in which Providence placed him a home. No parent is truly and fully a father till he is adopted by his own child. To be fully "born of God" is for the soul, being filled with the Holy Spirit, to acknowledge God's fatherly authority, accept God's law, live His life, do His work; or, in one word, to *love* God—"He that loveth is born of God." God is not fully "our Father" till we love Him as He loves us; and when a heart is won to love, there is joy in the presence of the angels for another holy child born into the great family of God.—*J. Morgan Gibbon.*

Ver. 8. *The Truth of Truths.*—No two persons ever see the same picture; the image is modified by the personality of him who sees it. No two persons have the same idea of God. He reveals Himself with a separate revelation to each individual soul. There have been two great and dominant ideas of God—one moral and the other physical. 1. *The moral.* The first great revelation of God was the revelation of Him as the moral governor. The Hebrew prophets lifted Him out of mere locality into a larger sphere; they preached Him as God of the whole earth, the God of righteousness. 2. *The physical.* This conception came from the Greeks. To them God was the underlying ground and cause of all things; He was power, being; He was infinite and eternal, without passion and without change.

I. **Each of these conceptions of God is profoundly true; and each must have its place in our thoughts.**—He controls this vast sphere of physical action by laws which cannot be broken, and which are perfectly good. "Of Him are all things, and in Him are all things." The conception of God as a moral governor has on the one hand been pressed as though it exhausted all that we know about Him; on the other hand, it has been darkened by analogies from human laws, until this supreme conception of a God of righteousness has been transmuted into a conception of One who curses where even men would bless, and who punishes where even men would pardon.

II. **The loftier, more Christian idea of God.**—The simplest conceptions are always the deepest. In three short words we are told that in the awful Maker of all things seen and unseen, the Infinite, the Absolute, the Eternal, there is something like that which draws the mother to the son and the sister to the brother. This is one of the most practical truths, and one of the most necessary. It is not a formless and impassive spirit that is close to us, but the infinitely holy, infinitely true, infinitely kind. This gives the thought of God a place in practical life.

III. **Here is the most practical of truths, and the most necessary.**—It is a special truth for our time. It contains the gospel we need; it comes to our sadness as a gospel of consolation; it comes to our restlessness as a gospel of repose. For material want there is material alleviation. Something beyond material relief. I speak of social unrest. To you who feel most of all the strain and stir of life, this revelation of God as love comes with a singular power, for it is the gospel of repose. When tired with noises and stir and strife, tired of the factiousness of political party feeling, with the meanness of social ambition, the chicanery

of commerce, just for a moment or two rise, as the spirit can, and rest in the eternal Father who loves you.

IV. **The supreme manifestation of the love of God in sending His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him.**—Let our thoughts rest on this one of the innumerable ways in which God's love has shown itself. To the truth of truths the text calls us. About other truths we may differ; in this, at least, we agree. Into some other truths there may enter elements of doubt which weaken their force as motives of conduct; but here is a sublime revelation. Let it be a sublime inspiration, a constraining motive. Let it be for us the supreme repose to know that the Father Himself loveth us, for "God is love."—*Edwin Hatch, D.D.*

Love to God.—Love is the highest, purest, holiest motive from which we can act. Faith makes us strong by keeping before us the great truths and realities of the world unseen. Hope helps us on our way by filling our souls with the longing expectation of the blessedness in store for us. But faith is cold, and hope is selfish, without *love*. Love is the going forth of the soul towards another, tender and glowing, generous and unselfish. Love will do all things, it will bear all things, for one it loves. And so we read that "Love is the fulfilling of the law." For, if we love God, we shall fulfil all our duty to God; and if we love man, we shall fulfil all our duty to man. And so to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves, takes in all we have to do. There would be no need for any other law, if we all obeyed perfectly the law of love. But think specially of love to God. As love is the best motive for our actions, so love to God is the best sort of love. For, when we love God, we are loving that which is perfect, loving Him who is alone perfectly worthy to be loved. And if we love God truly, we are quite sure to love His creatures also. So that the love of God is the fountain of all goodness. Now there are different ways in which we may love God. First, we may love Him for our own sakes, or because we love ourselves; that is, because of all His goodness to us. Another word for this sort of love is gratitude. And it is a right and good thing—only not the best. In this way we may love God for all the blessings we enjoy in this life, and this is the easiest sort of love to gain; or, better still, we may love Him for His spiritual mercies, for the gift of a blessed Redeemer, for the aid of His Holy Spirit, and for the hope of eternal happiness. But a higher and purer way of loving God is to love Him for His own sake, to love Him because He is so lovable—because our hearts are drawn to His infinite perfections—because He is so good in Himself, so fit to win His creatures' love. This is to love Him as the angels love Him. Perhaps man, while in this world, may never be able to love God entirely with this sort of love. Perhaps none can love quite in this way, except those who see face to face. When that time comes, oh, may we be filled with this pure, childlike, unselfish, angelic love! But, meanwhile, it is very hard to love One so exalted, so far above us in His nature, and so different from us, as God is. And God knew this. How thankful then should we be that, in pity to our weakness, God was pleased to take upon Himself the form and nature of man, so that we have One like ourselves to love—One who can, and does, feel for us and with us, and yet who is God. Those who might find it hard to love an infinite, almighty God, of whom they could form to themselves no image or likeness, will not find it so hard to love the meek, and gentle, and lowly, and loving Man Jesus Christ. How shall we gain more love? Like other Christian graces, it grows by degrees; and, like them, it is the gift of God. So, first of all, we must pray God for this gift of love. It is His Holy Spirit

which must make us love Him better; we can, indeed, only love Him by Himself, who "is love," dwelling within us. We must ask Him to give us of Himself, to come and fill our hearts, that they may be filled with love. 1. We must try to deepen our feeling of love by deepening our feeling of God's goodness. 2. We must seek to gain more love through faith in Jesus Christ. By looking steadfastly to Him, by realising (that is, making real to us) all He is to us, and all He has done for us, we shall best learn to love Him as He should be loved.—*W. Walsham How, D.D.*

Gnostic Ideas of God.—The Gnostics knew a good deal about God, but they did not know Him; for instead of loving those brethren who did not share their intellectual attainments, they had an arrogant contempt for them.

Ver. 9. *God's Love-gift.*—There are two ways of treating the records of Christ's birth into the world: (1) we may dwell on the incidents; or (2) we may ponder over the meanings, as Mary, the mother of Jesus, did. We may ask—Who sent Him? Why did He come? And what did He come to do? The apostle John is the person above all others who can worthily answer our questions.

I. **The secret of Christ's coming is God's love to us.**—The Babe is a *sent* one, and this is the message He carries. The absolute truth about God is this, "God is love." And that is the primary truth of the Christian revelation. By itself, however, as something only to *think*, it would be of little interest to us. We could never find any help in elaborate arguments to prove concerning our mother that "she is love." Love always wants to find expression—to make the loved one happy, to satisfy itself in what it can do for those on whom its love is set.

II. **The further secret of Christ's coming is this—God wanted to show His love to us.**—Love finds expression in *gifts*. Two things about gifts: 1. Love finds what will best express itself. It really gives itself in the gift. God loved the world, and wanted to give it something that would really be giving it Himself. Would any mere thing do? Nay, He would give His Son, who was Himself in the sphere of our human life, Himself in our humanity. 2. Love finds what will best satisfy those it loves. We ask what the loved one most needs. We find that, and we try to meet that. God asks what His creatures most need. There was something they needed which they hardly knew they needed—a Saviour from sin. God gave that. And God gave that as a *babe*, because He would save men from sin *through love*. Just what a babe can do is *win love, constrain hearts*, deliver from self, and so ennoble. What the infant Jesus did for Mary is the type of what Jesus does for us all. We have salvation in having the Saviour. Take God's love-gift into the heart, and let Him do His work there, and we are saved.

The Only Begotten Son.—"His Son, His only begotten" (μονογενής). The term is peculiar to St. John, and it means "only born," distinguishing between Him who was *born* a son, a son in such a way as can only be figured by a human generation, and those who are *made* sons, constituted such by an act of creation, which decided the being they should have, and the relations in which they should stand. *Matthew Henry* says: "This person is in some peculiar distinguishing way the Son of God; He is the only begotten. Should we suppose Him begotten as a creature or created being, He is not the only begotten. Should we suppose Him a natural necessary irradiation from the Father's glory, or glorious essence, or substance, He must be the only begotten; and then it will be a mystery and miracle of Divine love that such a Son should be sent into our world for us." In Heb. i. 6 the expression appears as "first-

begotten." What has to be discovered, and what is so difficult to discover, is the precise reason St. John had for speaking of Christ in this particular way. The term is indeed exclusively used by St. John, and the associations of the similar terms, "first-begotten," and "first-begotten from the dead," and "first-born," are altogether different. On four occasions in his gospel St. John mentions the "only begotten": once it is "only begotten of the Father"; three times it is "only begotten Son" (John i. 14, 18, iii. 16, 18). In 1 John v. 1 we have, "Him that is begotten of Him." In 1 John v. 18, "He that is begotten of God." But this last verse is somewhat confusing, because it applies the word "begotten" to believers, and we think it must be kept exclusively for Christ. In Rev. i. 5 Christ is spoken of as the "first-begotten of the dead." It cannot therefore be said that by St. John the idea of a relation to God which can only be represented by human generation is exclusively kept. But he certainly did conceive of a *unity* between God and Christ differing from the *relation* subsisting between God and Christ's people.

Vers. 9, 10. *Love's Highest Manifestation.*—The text is one of the loveliest gems of gospel truth, and the context forms an appropriately beautiful setting. Love is of God, yea, is of the very essence of His being; to be loveless is to be godless, while to love is to be a "partaker of the Divine nature."

I. **The feeling manifested.**—Not mere goodness or benevolence, but *love.* "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." "Like as a father." "Thy Maker is thine husband" (Isa. xlix. 15, 16). It is love that "passeth knowledge," for it is an attribute of the infinite Being.

II. **Toward whom manifested.**—Consider: 1. *Our insignificance.* "What is man, that Thou shouldst magnify him, and that Thou shouldst set Thine heart upon him?" 2. *Our depravity and guilt.* "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Tit. iii. 3-6). 3. *Our indifference and hostility.* "Herein is love, not that we loved God," etc. "When we were enemies, we were reconciled unto God by the death of His Son."

III. **How manifested.**—1. "*Sent His only begotten Son.*" Consider: (1) The greatness of Christ. "God over all, blessed for ever." Same in substance with Father, equal in power and glory. (2) His nearness and dearness to the Father. "Only begotten, well beloved"; "His dear Son." Our children are endeared to us because they are our own flesh and blood, resemble us, have been long associated with us, and have shown fidelity and affection. Christ "and the Father are one"; He is "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person"; "was in the beginning with God"; and is ever faithful and loving. "I delight to do Thy will; yea, Thy law is within My heart." (See 2 Pet. i. 17.) 2. "*Sent into the world*"—a world alienated from God, averse to holiness, and hostile toward holy characters. Parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matt. xxi. 34-38). Incarnate Virtue appeared on earth, and instead of worshipping Him the people crucified Him between two thieves. God sent Him with full knowledge of His future sufferings and shame—saw Him recoiling from loathsome touch of tempter, agonising in Gethsemane with piteous appeal to His Father, and heard Him cry in desertion of soul upon the cross, "My God, My God!" And not only with foreknowledge, but predetermination. The very conditions of the Incarnation necessitated the Crucifixion; the path from Bethlehem to Calvary was a straight one marked out by God Himself. "God sent forth His Son, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law." But Christ could only "redeem us from the curse of the law" by "being made a curse for us." The Father therefore deliberately "laid on Him the iniquity

of us all," and delivered Him over to punitive justice (Acts ii. 23; Rom. viii. 32).

IV. **For what purpose manifested.**—1. "*To be the propitiation for our sins*" (Rom. iii. 23-26; Col. i. 20-22). 2. "*That we might live through Him*" (John iii. 16, x. 10).—*Agape.*

Ver. 10. *The Propitiation.*—The greater anything is, the more sides and aspects it will present to view; the less will it be revealed to any one view, the more necessary it becomes to observe it from every possible standpoint. A dwelling-house can be comprehended after a few minutes' examination; but a cathedral discloses ever new parts, new relations, new proportions, and new adornments to the man who can be patient, can look at it from every angle, and under every variety of circumstance,—when the sunshine, streaming in through the coloured windows, makes a glory round every pillar and floods the pavement with tints; or when the shadowy twilight makes a saintly gloom hang over the arches; or when the full cold moonlight seems to people aisle and choir with ghostly shapes; or when sounds of holy music rise from the worshippers and circle round, and swell high, going up to God; or when all is still, no human voice is heard, the buried saints alone seem to fill the place, and in the stillness the soul can almost catch the echoes of the heavenly song. And God's truth is a great whole that is, for us, many-sided, and can never be *perfectly* known by any one of us. And that particular part of truth which concerns the recovery and salvation of men is one of these great and many-sided things. We may all get our own best positions for examining the great cathedral of the redemption truth, and be thankful for the fitnesses and beauties which we can for ourselves discover. St. Paul helps us to understand the meaning of this expression in the text, "the propitiation for sins," when he writes in this way of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Whom God hath set forth a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Rom. iii. 25). By making "propitiation for the sin of the world," let us then understand this little part or piece of the great whole of redeeming truth—the righteousness of God is seen in His justifying freely, as an act of infinite grace, all who, having sinned, believe the message of forgiveness brought to them by Jesus Christ, and sealed to them in His blood. But how does Christ, set forth, declare the righteousness of God in the forgiveness of sin?

I. **Christ is the Ambassador of the act of grace.**—As Ambassador His credentials were abundant, and in every way satisfactory. His life itself is the great proof that He was the Son of God. His words were Divine words; His miracles were exhibitions of Divine power. Who has ever doubted the *righteousness* of those messages which Moses and the prophets delivered for God, and concerning Him? Because we are sure that they were men sent from God, we are sure that their message was a righteous message. Then if Jesus Christ was the very highest of all ambassadors, the message He brought was a righteous message, a faithful expression of that eternal righteousness which belongs to Him who is "light," and in whom is no darkness at all. What then did Jesus tell us concerning God? He preached, on God's behalf, the *forgiveness of sins.* He Himself forgave sin. We never can think of Jesus as acting unrighteously when He said to the paralytic, "Thy sins are forgiven thee"; or to the woman whom everybody knew as a sinner, "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee." But in those cases Jesus was only showing us God, and telling His message to men. Jesus commanded men to forgive one another freely, so that they might be children of their heavenly Father, who forgave freely. He sent out His

disciples into the world to preach everywhere His message for the remission of sins. And on His very cross He prayed for His murderers, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." His very presence here among men was an act of grace. It seemed to say—God has not forsaken even His sinful world. He pities His lost creatures. He will even sacrifice His best if He may save the lost. And the character of Jesus—His perfect righteousness—seems to guarantee the righteousness of His work. He was, all through His life, showing us God; and none ever dwelt among men who showed, as He has shown, the infinite holiness, the spotless righteousness, of God. None of us can think that the gospel which the righteous Jesus brought in any sense limits the perfections of God. Let Christ then preach us His God-honouring gospel. It is the free forgiveness of sins. It is the announcement of God's gracious act of pardon. Christ came to bring that message to earth, and in order to make us believe it, He sealed it with His own blood. God is not merely willing to forgive; He has once for all forgiven every one who will believe His word. "He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His holy gospel" of full and free forgiveness.

II. **Christ demands and works such a moral change in men as declares His righteousness in granting forgiveness.**—The apostle Paul explains to us that "propitiation is through faith in His blood." But his language is very careful. He does not say, "a propitiation through His blood"; or, "a propitiation by His blood"; but he distinctly and precisely says, "a propitiation *through faith*," the object of the faith being "the blood." Faith is the thing set so prominently before us—our justification by faith, our forgiveness upon faith, our acceptance on the ground of faith. Evidently this faith is something belonging to men, and it implies some great moral change wrought in men. When the king announces to his rebellious subjects his free pardon of all their offences, and sends that pardon by the hands of his messenger, who is it that needs to be propitiated? Plainly enough, it is not the king. He *is* propitiated, or he would not send that message of pardon. There is no enmity in him. It is that rebel nation that needs to be appeased. They have taken up an ill-will against their king. It is the work of the king's messenger to appease men's anger, and sooth down their ill-feeling toward their king, and so induce them to lay down their arms, and accept his sovereign mercy. What hinders rebels from receiving the forgiveness offered them? Surely nothing but *their rebellion*. As long as that spirit of rebellion lasts, they cannot have the pardon, though it is proclaimed. How can a man have the king's pardon while he grasps his weapons? By that continued act he really refuses the pardon. But let his mind be changed, let him throw down those weapons; and *then* the proclaimed forgiveness covers even him beneath its shadow; then there has been propitiation between the king and his rebellious subjects; then the king's messenger has become the propitiator, or propitiatory, the mercy-seat where the separated ones have met in reconciliation. This is the truth to which our attention should be most anxiously given—Man needs to be propitiated; man's enmity against God needs to be appeased. We need that Jesus Christ should be a propitiator to us, and change our hearts towards God. That is the very work entrusted to the Messenger and Ambassador, Jesus Christ. He is sent into the world, that by His life, by His teachings, by His deeds, by His moral influence, by the holy persuasions of His sacrifice, He might get a redeeming power on the hearts of men—breaking down middle walls of partition, changing pride for humility, replacing hard-heartedness with repentance, and hatred of God for love to Him. The great aim of our Lord's work is, so to

bear persuasions on the hearts of men, that they should be willing to accept salvation by grace. How Christ works that change in men's hearts can only be briefly suggested. It is done partly by that most attractive view of God which Jesus brings: partly, as Jesus shows us what a *real son of God* is, and so what we should be; partly, by a most extraordinary proof of love; God's own Son is willing to sacrifice Himself, even in a most painful and shameful death, in order to convince us that God does love us with an everlasting love, and does want to save us. Whosoever *believes* becomes another man by believing.

Ver. 13. "*Of His Spirit.*"—It would be precisely in accordance with St. John's teaching here if we read "spirit," or disposition. What God gives to those who are in vital relations with Him is, the *spirit of His own love*, which inspires them also to self-sacrifice.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 15—21.

The Triumphs of the Perfect Love.—There is considerable repetition of statement in this epistle, the repetition of a man who has a few main truths which he holds tightly, and loves to brood over. He delights in the sound of them, and so goes over them again and again. The additional thought here is, that when our love—our love to God, and to our brother—has grown into such strength that it can fairly be called "perfect," that is, perfect within the measures of the human, it proves to have a splendid power in our lives, elevating us to meet all occasions, freeing us from all fear, giving us grand inspirations, and even making us bold to meet the testings of the judgment day. Then, as if it were to him an absolutely essential point, he urges again on attention that the love he means is only *that love* which comes by the conviction and persuasion of God's love in Christ to us, and finds its natural and befitting expression in self-sacrificing love to the brethren. Ver. 18 is "proof of the preceding statement that perfect love will give us boldness, by showing the mutually exclusive nature of love and fear. Love moves towards others in the spirit of self-sacrifice; fear shrinks from others in the spirit of self-preservation. The two are to be understood quite generally; neither love of God nor fear of God is specially meant. In all relations whatever, perfect love excludes fear, and fear prevents love from being perfect. And the two vary inversely: the more perfect the love, the less possibility of fear; and the more the fear, the less perfect the love. But though as certain as any physical law, the principle, that perfect love excludes all fear, is an ideal that has never been verified in fact. Like the first law of motion, it is verified by the approximations made to it. No believer's love has ever been so perfect as entirely to banish fear; but every believer experiences that as his love increases his fear diminishes" (*A. Plummer, D.D.*).

I. **Love's triumph in the judgment day.**—What can there possibly be to condemn in a life ruled and toned by love? That can be answered by asking another question—What was there to condemn in that human life which was lived by the Lord Jesus, and was ruled and toned by love? It is inconceivable that the Lord Jesus could fear any attempt to appraise, or test, or judge His human life. Then, in the degree in which we have the perfect love, it can be said of us, "As He is, so are we in this world," and therefore we need fear judgment no more that He did.

II. **Love's triumph over the inward distress of fear.**—"Perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment." It worries us, causes fretting and anxiety, because it keeps our thoughts circling round *self* and *self-interests*.

There is no fear in love, because it takes us out of ourselves, and makes us spend ourselves in the service of others. And *anxiety* about them is altogether different from *fear*, which concerns ourselves. "If we live in this serene atmosphere of pure sympathy with God and man, Christ is in us, and we in Him, because God is love itself. Sharing His nature, therefore, we must be like Him; and the more completely we allow this Divine love towards our Father and our brothers to transform our whole being, the more we shall be like our Judge, and the less cause we shall have for dread." "The more perfect this disposition of serene sympathy becomes, the less share can any form of anxiety have in it. Where it is a well-grounded sympathy with a perfect being, its serenity is all the more complete in proportion to its sincerity."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 15. *The Divinity of Christ a Test Doctrine.*—"Jesus is the Son of God." Compare ver. 2, which demands the confession that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh," or took upon Himself a veritable human body. But this comparison brings to view a distinction not always recognised. Belief in the humanity of Christ is absolutely demanded as a condition of being a Christian at all; but no such absolute demand is made in relation to belief in Christ's Divinity. What is said about that is that it is essential to the *higher Christian life*, it belongs to the higher experiences; the man who can see in Christ the Son of God enters into the more advanced privileges; God dwelleth in him, and he in God. When this distinction is set before us, we remember that our Lord's disciples had Him first in a human fellowship, and apprehended Him, and believed in Him as the Messiah-man Christ Jesus. It even appears that they only very slowly grew into the idea of His Divine Sonship. St. Peter was manifestly in advance of them all with his confession. But none of them entered into the higher life of relations with Christ until they did fully grasp the truth of the Divine Sonship. To be saved men must believe in the *human Saviour*, in Christ "come in the flesh." To be sanctified, to attain the higher life, men must believe that "Jesus is the Son of God." So the test of the regenerate life *was*—and perhaps, if we stated things aright, we should see that it still *is*—believing that Christ is "come in the flesh." And the test of Christian attainment is the sign of the cultured soul-power that can grip the truth, that "Jesus is the *Son of God.*"

Ver. 16. *God is Love.*—There is one form of worship that is universal and involuntary, and that is the resemblance which the deity and the devotee are certain to bear to one another. They who worship an idol are like to the idol in the beginning, for they fashion it after the model of something in themselves; but they grow more and more like to it afterwards, by sharing and copying the qualities with which they fancy the false god to be endowed. No man is *better* than what he burns incense to, but every man takes on more and more of the character of his favourite divinity. How came human parents by their love? Through the being made in the image and likeness of God. Parental love is a valuable salvage from the wreck of the Fall. This is our subject—the divinity of Love, and the love of Divinity.

I. **The strong representation, "God is love."**—There is a most vital difference betwixt the *conduct* of any being and the *character* of any being; and there is a yet further distinction between character and *essence*. This emphatic language—the calling the Being the attribute—is a dignity reserved for this *one attribute alone*. I read that "with God is terrible

majesty," but I have no recollection of being told that "God is majesty." (See, however, the expression "God is light.") How could *love* have been embodied so richly as it was in the Seeker and Saviour of the lost, the Friend of little children, the Companion of sorrowful women, the Comforter of penitent outcasts, the Refuge of publicans and sinners, and the Sacrifice in body and blood for the world of the ungodly? Surely, herein is *love*. This text is Immanuel in print. We want both the "love" and the "God." Call Christ "God," or call Christ "Love," as you need Him at the moment, for He is both. Being both makes Him the Mediator.

II. **The extraordinary language touching the relation of the Christian with Christ.**—We are, first, the inhabitants, with Christ for a dwelling, and then we are the houses, in which Christ makes a home. Two very different ideas, but both equally beautiful and equally instructive.—*Henry Christopherson.*

Vers. 18-21. *Perfect Love casteth out Fear.*—(This outline is given as an illustration of the evangelistic method of dealing with the passage.)

I. **The state of an awakened soul.**—"Fear hath torment." There are two kinds of fear mentioned in the Bible. The one is the atmosphere of heaven, the other of hell. 1. There is the fear of love. 2. There is the fear of terror. Deal with the latter, and explain its rise in the soul. (1) A natural man casteth off fear, and restrains prayer before God. (2) When the Spirit of God opens the eyes, He makes the sinner tremble. (3) The Spirit makes him feel the greatness of sin, the exceeding sinfulness of it. (4) Then the sense of corruption working in the heart torments the soul. (5) The Spirit also convinces the soul of his inability to help himself. (6) And then the man fears he shall never be in Christ.

II. **The change on believing.**—1. The love here spoken of is not our love to God, but His to us; for it is called perfect love. 2. But where does this love fall? On Jesus Christ.

III. **His love gives boldness in the day of judgment.**—Because then—1. Christ shall be our Judge. 2. The Father Himself loves us.

IV. **The consequences of being in the love of God.**—1. We love Him. 2. We love our brother.—*R. M. McCheyne.*

Ver. 18. *Two Kinds of Fear.*—The Bible speaks of two kinds of fear. One is terror, fright, dread,—the lively apprehension of evil to come; the crouching and crying of the dog in anticipation of the lash whose whistle in the air he already hears. The other is reverence, respect, adoration,—the awe that fills the mind as it stands in the presence of errorless Wisdom; the instinctive tribute that weakness pays to Omnipotence; the admiration that human frailty cannot conceal, or suppress, when God's flawless goodness rises before it; tho impression of the Divine on the human; the worshipful stoop of the soul before God, not because it is frightened, not because God has thunder-bolts in His hands, and legions of heaven-bright warriors, with swords that turn every way around Him, but because He is altogether lovely, because He has mercy for thousands, because He is holy and good, because He is God—because He is *Love.*—*J. Morgan Gibbon.*

Love and Fear.—In the epistles of the apostle of love comes out most broadly, most sternly, the principle that all mankind are divided into two great classes,—the one, those that are of God; and the other, those that are of the world and of the devil. Whatever is not of light is darkness. There are only two motives, St. John says, that rule men in regard to God—only two emotions: either love or fear.

I. **The universal dominion of fear.**—Wherever there is not the presence of active love. This rests on the universal consciousness of sin. All men everywhere have some more or

less active or torpid working of conscience. It is not made doubtful by the fact, that the ordinary condition of men is not one of active dread of God. Man has a strange power of refusing to think of a subject, because he knows that to think of it would be torture and terror. The fear which springs from the conviction of God as righteous, and the consciousness of individual sinfulness, varies in energy with the varying strength of these two convictions, and it assumes various forms. Sometimes it appears as a straining after forgetfulness—that is fear wearing the mask of godlessness. Sometimes it assumes the very opposite shape, and becomes the underlying basis of vast and complicated systems of rigorous, joyless worship—that is fear wearing the mask of godliness. Sometimes this fear takes the understanding into its pay, and appears as enlightened disbelief in God and immortality. Sometimes it takes the shape of vehement efforts to get rid of unwelcome thought by fierce plunging into business, or into wild riot. Whatever form it take, the fear which hath torment lies like a sleeping serpent in the hearts of all who think of God, and who cannot say, "We have known and believed the love which God hath to us."

II. **The fearlessness of perfect love.**—Love is no weak thing, no mere sentiment. The manliness of Christian love, and the putting away from ourselves of all fear, because we are "perfected in love," is one of the highest lessons that the gospel teaches us, and one of the greatest things which the gospel gives us. Love and fear exclude each other. Fear is based upon a consideration of some possible personal evil consequence coming down upon me from that clear sky above me. Love is based upon the forgetfulness of self altogether. The love of God, entering a man's heart, destroys all fear of Him. All the attributes of God come to be on our side. The love which casts out fear rises in the heart as a consequence of knowing and believing the love which God hath to us. This love to God, which is built upon God's love to us, is the all-powerful motive for every good thing. If you would grow in power, holiness, blessedness, remember this, "Love is the fulfilling of the law." Perfect *love* is perfect man. And love, which destroys fear, heightens reverence and deepens self-distrust.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

Ver. 19. *The Genesis of Christian Love.*—"We love, because He first loved us." Spontaneous love, loving just because He is love, and must give out Himself, may be predicated of God, but it can be predicated of none else. Yet even the love of God can do nothing until it finds an object to spend itself upon. All love other than God's is kindled by love. It is like life—it cannot exist save by the contact of love. Nobody on earth ever loves unless he is loved. The love may be that of some one who loves us, or it may be the love of some one whom we love. In any and every case we love because somebody loves us. And St. John does not simply say that we love God because He loves us; but he urges the larger and altogether more searching truth, that the love of God to us cannot have its right influence on us unless it *makes us loving*—loving to the brethren, loving to everybody. The Christian love is precisely that feeling a man can alone have when he "knows and believes the love that God hath unto him."

Love the Cause of Love.

I. **The love of God to us as sinners is the "sole" cause of our love to Him.**—To make this fully appear, we may specify those other sources from which this disposition might be supposed to proceed. 1. Our love to God might be supposed to be the result of a *superior discernment* of the Divine character. But as that character is an object of dislike to all men in their natural, fallen state, it is obvious that this repugnance is not to be overcome by the exhibition of that character in

a clearer light. An object of terror or dislike, so long as it is viewed as such, cannot be loved; and the more distinctly such an object appears, the more intensely will it be hated. The antipathy to it can only be removed by means of some *new* discovery, which shall place that object in an attractive light. 2. It might be thought that love to God, where it exists, is the result of some *predisposition* in the sinner's heart towards God. Such partialities and predilections operate very generally among men. But since the heart of every man, by nature, is at enmity to God, our love to Him cannot be attributed to this source. If in any heart it might have originated thus, we should expect to find it in the amiable John. But he himself is no exception. 3. It might be supposed, again, that the principle of love to God is *directly planted* in the heart by the hand of God. But true love cannot be *forced*; it withers under the breath and touch of violence. No other source but the Divine compassion to us as sinners can give birth to this heavenly principle.

II. **This love of God is the "sufficient" cause of our love to Him.**—The stoutest rebel must relent and love a Being whose mercy and compassion he has been brought to *feel* extends to *himself.*—*Anon.*

Ver. 20. *Keeping with Brethren.*—To separate ourselves from our brethren is to lose power. Half-dead brands heaped close will kindle one another, and flame will sparkle beneath the film of white ashes on their edges. Fling them apart, and they go out. Rake them together, and they glow. Let us try not to be little, feeble tapers, stuck in separate sockets, and each twinkling struggling rays over some inch or so of space; but draw near to our brethren, and be workers together with them, that there may rise a glorious flame from our summed and collective brightness which shall be a guide and hospitable call to many a wandering and weary spirit.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 8. *The Love of God.*—"God is love." This single announcement of the beloved disciple, contradicted by so many appearances, yet carrying its own evidence—in the world around us met by many a No and many a murmur, and from the caverns of despair fetching up a fiendish laughter, and yet countersigned by Jehovah's handwriting on the ruined tablets of the heart, and in trumpet tones reverberated from the hills of immortality—this shortest of sentences, and most summary of gospels, which a breath can utter, and which a signet ring can contain—is the truth which, shining bright at the Advent, will overspread the world in the millennium's mild lustre. It is a truth on which no man has mused too much, even although he has pondered it all his days, and to which no anthem can do justice, except that in which golden harps mingle, and in which the redeemed from among men are helped by the seraphim.—*Dr. James Hamilton.*

The Heart of God.—History's noblest deed and record of love is in the self-devotion of the generous heathen Pylades, who forfeited his life to save his friend; but "God commendeth His love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "You have not seen," says a great writer and profound thinker, "the greatest gift of all—the heart of God, the love of His heart, the heart of His love. And will He in very deed show us that? Yes, unveil that cross, and see. It was His only mode of showing us His heart. It is infinite love labouring to reveal itself—agonising to utter the fulness of infinite love. Apart from that act, a boundless ocean of love would have remained for ever shut up and concealed in the heart of God; but now it has found an ocean-channel. Beyond this He cannot go. Once and for ever the proof has been given, 'God is love.'"

Our Love comes from God.—As the rays come from the sun, and yet are not the sun, even so our love and pity, though they are not God, but merely a poor, weak image and reflection of Him, yet from Him alone they come. If there is mercy in our hearts, it comes from the fountain of mercy. If there is the light of love in us, it is

a ray from the full sun of His love.—*Rev. C. Kingsley.*

The Ocean of Divine Love.—In that great ocean of the Divine love we live, and move, and have our being, floating in it like some sea-flower which spreads its filmy beauty, and waves its long tresses, in the depths of mid-ocean. The sound of its waters is ever in our ears, and above, beneath, around us its mighty currents run evermore.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

Ver. 17. *Perfect Love.*—We are a long way yet from perfect love; it is too Divine a thing to be speedily fulfilled in the creature. But we are coming to it; and then, when we do come to it, we shall know more fully how great and blessed it is as the best wine, creation's endless festival, by reviewing the ages upon ages of division and strife through which we have struggled on to the unity of love in Christ. The labours of God, the labours of the angels, the labours of the Church, the groans and contentions of all creatures and all elements, will go on, and never cease, until the redemption of mankind; for the perfect individual is essential to the perfection of love.—*Pulsford.*

Ver. 18. *Love casting out Fear.*—The literal sense of this verse is as follows: (Slavish) fear exists not in this love, but perfect love (such as this) casts aside fear; for (such) fear carries with it terror (which is inconsistent with love), since he who feareth is not perfected in love, does not love perfectly and sincerely. φόβος, "fear," here signifies a fear, not of displeasing God, but of incurring His punishment, which conscience raises. "Casteth out fear" refers to the previous verse, and is contrasted with a joyful confidence in the mercy of God.—*Bloomfield.*

Ver. 19. *Love-won Love.*—Have you seen a broad, straight path of silver brightness lying by night upon a smooth sea, and stretching from your feet away until it was lost in the distance—a path that seemed to have been trodden by the feet of all the saints who have ever passed through a shifting world to the eternal home? Oh, that silver path by night across the sea, it glittered much; but it was not its brightness that lighted up the moon in the sky, neither was it the love to Jesus, trembling in a believer's heart, that kindled forgiving love in Him! The love that makes bright a forgiven sinner's path across the world was kindled by the light of life in the face of Jesus.—*W. Arnot.*

CHAPTER V.

FAITH THE SOURCE OF LOVE, AND LOVE THE FRUIT OF FAITH.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

GENUINE faith in Christ is the sure sign of the new life—faith in the sense of living, daily trust. The faith which links us with Christ in sonship carries with it a twofold love: love to the Father, which is shown in keeping His commandments; and love to the brethren—the other sons—which is shown in self-denying service. "The very object of the Divine birth is the conquest of all that is opposed to God and to His commandments, and the instrument of the conquest is faith." "There is an historical faith, or receiving of Christ, which precedes the new birth. But the sure and certain persuasion that Jesus is the Christ, the Mediator, Prophet, Priest, and King, with a practical and personal trust in Him as such for salvation, is the principal fruit of the new birth."

Ver. 1. **Born.**—Better, as R.V., "begotten." **Him that begat.**—God. See chap. iv. 7. So our Lord pleaded that men could not really love God, if they did not receive and love the Son whom He had sent.

Ver. 2. **Keep His commandments.**—A reminiscence of our Lord's teachings (John xiv. 15, 21, 23, xv. 10: see also 2 John 6).

Ver. 3. **Not grievous.**—It is never a strain to obey those whom we *love*. It is of the very nature of love to make obedience easy. Were we perfect, we should not find God's requirements to be commands at all; they would be our natural impulses. Commands indeed are only helps from outside us towards our being what we ourselves would wish to be, if we were our free, best selves.

Ver. 4. **Overcometh the world.**—The world is regarded as the sphere of the self-seeking principle. He who is born of God is born into another sphere—the sphere of the God-seeking principle. And the higher overmasters the lower. τὸν κόσμον; the present order of things as opposed to the kingdom of Christ. **Victory that overcometh.**—R.V. "hath overcome"

(Rom. viii. 2). **Our faith.**—Which unites us to Christ, and makes us participators in His victory.

Vers. 6, 7.—In R.V. ver. 7 is properly omitted. It is an interpolation, and probably inserted to meet the exigencies of the Trinitarian controversy. **By water and blood.**—*I.e.* with these distinguishing marks or evidences. Water is the symbol of our Lord's baptism; blood, of our Lord's cross, passion, and sacrifice. Observe that these stand at the beginning and at the close of His ministry, and so present to us the *whole life*. He was declared to be the Son of God by the Divine voice at His baptism. He was declared to be the Son of God by His resurrection, when His life-work was completed in the shedding of His blood. So these two things become the ground of our faith in Him. **The Spirit.**—The witness within us, which fits to the witness of the water and the blood outside us. Notice the use of ἐν and διά in this verse. Jesus showed Himself to be Messiah by means of (διά) the water and the blood; ἐν marks the sphere, substratum, element, *in* which the proof was afforded. **Not by water only.**—This is directed against the Cerinthians, who held that Jesus did suffer on the cross, but the Christ did not. St. John asserts that the *same Jesus* to whom the Divine testimony came at baptism, received the Divine testimony when His life-mission was completed on the cross. He has the testimony of both the water and the blood; and the inward witness of the Spirit seals the double testimony. **Spirit is truth.**—Better, the truth: truth in perfection. His inward witness may be absolutely trusted.

Ver. 8.—This is but a repetition of ver. 6, for the sake of emphasising it.

Ver. 9. **Receive.**—λαμβάνομεν; admit as valid. The testimony of two human witnesses is admitted; here is the threefold testimony of God—the voice at baptism, the acceptance in resurrection, the Spirit in our hearts.

Ver. 10. **Witness in himself.**—In two ways—in having the permanently abiding Spirit, and in having a personal experience. **Made Him a liar.**—Because to fail to trust a person is really to declare him untrustworthy.

Ver. 11. **Record.**—Statement or declaration which we are required to believe. "The Christian creed is here reduced to a very small compass—the gift of eternal life, and the dependence of that life upon His Son." **Eternal life.**—Not merely continuing life, but that new life we have by spiritual birth. Eternal life is that which we now understand by *spiritual* life. That is in its nature continuous. On it the "second death" can have no power. It depends on our relation to Jesus Christ. To have Christ by faith is to breathe the first breath of the eternal life. The life is in Christ for impartation to us, and the receptivity in us is our faith.

Vers. 13-21 may be treated as a summary and conclusion. They divide into three parts: 1. Faith in the Son of God, eternal life, and love of the brethren showing itself in intercession, are recalled to mind. 2. Three great facts which believers know are restated. 3. A last practical warning is given. In the first part the new thought is, the association of boldness in prayer with the love of the brethren (vers. 14-17).

Ver. 16. **Sin not unto death . . . sin unto death.**—The usual distinction between sins of frailty and sins of will. Sins of frailty are possible to the child of God; sins of will indicate that, for the time, the child-spirit is dead—he cannot sin *wilfully* who is born of God. St. John deals very carefully with the latter case. "Not concerning that do I say that he should make request." Wilful sin in one claiming to have the Divine life does not come into the range of Christian prayer for the brethren, because such a case is not regarded as possible. St. John does not go so far as to say that it is not a subject for prayer at all.

Ver. 21. **Idols.**—Better, "the idols"; or "your idols." "This parting word is suggested by the thought of the 'true God.' Every scheme of thought, every object of affection, which is not of Him, is a rival of His empire, a false god, a delusive appearance only, without solidity or truth." "Every street through which St. John's readers walked, and every heathen house they visited, swarmed with idols in the literal sense; and magnificent temples and groves, and seductive idolatrous rites, constituted some of the chief attractions at Ephesus." "Of the strictness which was necessary in order to preserve Christians from the attractions of idolatry the history of the first four centuries is full." St. John hints that Jesus is no idol. The Son of God, who was manifested in the flesh as the Son of man, was a Being not only altogether worthy to be worshipped and served, but a Being whose worship and service are supremely ennobling.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—3.

The Love of the Father involves the Love of His Sons.—"Whosoever loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him." These words give the point of this paragraph. It is a common delusion of Christian professors, that

they can keep in saving relations with God while they persist in keeping unloving relations with men. The delusion is based upon the failure to recognise the essential *family element* in Christianity. The supreme mission of the Christian revelation, the very essence of the work of Christ, is the full restoration of the family relation in which God designed to stand with His creatures, and still wishes to stand. It was that family relationship which the wilful sin of the children broke up. Men ceased to be *sons*; they persisted in being *men*. God might be King, but they refused to recognise Him as the "eternal Father." And there was no hope for humanity until, maybe through a bitter experience, the self-willed prodigal turned his thoughts to Father and home. And turning his thoughts to Father and home is just the work which the Lord Jesus did, by the manifestation of His own Sonship, and by the holy persuasion of His teachings. It is the fashion of our day to insist that all the social, and political, and national woes of humanity would be cured, if men did but fully believe in, and heartily carry out, the "brotherhood of humanity." They do not see that, standing by itself, with no common love, or common interest, beyond its own interest, human brotherhood never has been, and never can be, anything but *selfish*, and, being selfish, it never can be a real brotherhood. No brotherhood is possible save out of a common fatherhood. And so Christ brought men together, as nobody else has ever brought them, because He has revealed the Father-God, who is the Father of them all. "Whosoever loveth [the Father] who begat loveth also [the sons and brothers] who are begotten of Him." It is missing the point to say that the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God is *one* of the doctrines of the Christian faith. It is the first, it is the foundation, it is the essential doctrine. It has nothing whatever to say to men about themselves or their relations until it has *put them right with God*—made them think rightly of God, and brought them into gracious reconciliations with Him.

I. **Loving the Father.**—"Him that begat." The love required is precisely that which is characteristic of good children, and is the law of their life. St. John tells us that believing the only begotten Son wakens the sonship in us, and makes us feel like those who are "born of God." And that is the actual fact of our experience. When we believe in Christ the Son, we begin to feel that we are sons with Him, and like Him. And He adds, that as soon as the *feeling* of sonship comes to us, the *signs* of sonship will appear in our life and conduct. We shall do just as Jesus did; we shall "keep our Father's commandments." In our limited human measures we shall say, what the Divine Son could say, "My meat and My drink is to do the will of My Father." The question of our *being sons* is settled if we are *sonlike*, as Christ was.

II. **When we love the Father, everything else will come right.**—All the human relationships will be rightly toned; all the human responsibilities will be rightly borne. Was the Lord Jesus the very ideal of sacrificing brotherhood? It was but His Sonship getting expression in the family sphere. It will be thus with all who share His Sonship. They cannot help it—they cannot be true to themselves and help it—they must be brothers and brotherly. The love of the Father is the source of love to His children. And *Maurice* wisely says, "That is the natural order; that, we may say it confidently, is the universal order." "If love of God is absent, then our love of our fellows is not genuine—is earthly, is a mockery. If love of our fellows is absent, then have we no love for God. All friendship must be tested by loyalty to God; all love to Him must be tested by charity."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 1. *Faith and the New Birth.*—"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God." What appears to be asserted is, that faith is at once the *condition* and the *sign* of the new life. Confusion comes by limiting faith to the acceptance of some particular proposition concerning Christ. Men are said to be saved when they declare their belief in some statement about Christ which is made to them. What we need to see clearly is, that faith is the very *essence of the child-spirit.* A child cannot be a child without faith. And wherever there is faith there is a child-spirit. So faith is the *condition* of the new birth. There never yet was a soul alive unto God that did not believe and trust. And being the *condition*, it becomes also the *sign.* See what a man is toward God, toward God manifested in Christ, and you can tell whether he is a child. If he is born of God, he will as surely believe and trust as the new-born babe will cry.

Ver. 3. *A Misapprehension of the Commandments.*—"And His commandments are not grievous." They seem to be sometimes, because they put us into limitations and restraints. But of one thing we can be absolutely sure—the commandments are no abstract or arbitrary things. They are Fatherly arrangements, precisely adapted to secure the truest welfare of the children. And this we can see plainly—the commandments never were in any sense grievous to Christ. If we ever feel them to be grievous, it must be because we are failing from that perfect love which always carries with it perfect trust and perfect submission. Two reasons have been given as explaining why the Father's commandments are not grievous. 1. He gives us strength to bear them and do them. 2. Love makes the Father's yoke (which Christ called His) feel light and easy. The commandments are only grievous *when we resist them.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 4—8.

The Power that overcomes the World.—It is usual to limit thought to faith as the power that ensures our victory over our surroundings, our "overcoming the world"; but if this paragraph be taken as connected thinking, it will be seen that St. John explains what faith it is that thus overcomes the world. It is the faith in the Sonship of Jesus, which links us to Him, makes us sons like Him, and brings to us the victory of obedience and submission which He won. (It will be understood that ver. 7, in this paragraph, is treated as an interpolation, inserted by some later hand to support a particular theory.)

I. **The faith that overcomes.**—It is significant that St. John should say, "even our faith." It may be true—it is in fact true—that faith, as one of the powers of human nature, the power that enables a man to act upon unseen considerations, does enable men to rise above the entanglement and depression of present circumstances. The world could not get on without faith. All her high triumphs have been triumphs of *faith.* But St. John's *world* is not the world of material difficulties, but the world of moral evils. And he knows well enough that commonplace human faith can never gain victory over that. It is *our* faith—that specific thing which must be called the "Christian faith," which alone can overcome the moral world, the world of evil.

II. **The object of the faith that overcomes.**—"Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." It should not be possible for us to

miss the point of St. John's teaching in these sentences. It is the man who, believing in Jesus as the Son of God, is himself a son of God who overcomes the world. The object of faith is the Sonship, or, more precisely, *Christ the Son.* His Sonship was the secret of His triumph over the world, which, though He lived in, He was not of. And our sonship in Him will have to be the secret of our triumph, if ever it be said of us, they have overcome the world.

III. **The grounds faith has for resting on this object.**—Jesus the Son is fully attested; the witnesses are altogether sufficient and trustworthy. There are three witnesses to the acceptable Sonship. The *Spirit*, who testifies of Christ in our hearts. (But it is quite possible that St. John had in his mind the spirit of the life of Jesus, which was the most perfect expression of sonship, and the satisfactory attestation that He was the Son.) The *water*, which stands for the direct testimony given by the Father at our Lord's baptism: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And the *blood*, which stands for the Divine acceptance of our Lord's sacrifice—the self-sacrifice of the Son—which was declared in His resurrection from the dead. "These three agree in one" thing; they declare that "Jesus is the Son of God," and present Him to us, *in this relation*, as the object of our faith.

The Worldly Idea of overcoming the World.—We read in history of one in departed days who fancied that he had accomplished the hard task of "overcoming the world." We read how he carried his victorious arms over every region of the then known earth—how he subjugated king after king, and brought nation after nation beneath his sway, and then fancied that he had "overcome the world." We read how he felt it sad to think that his heroic task was done, and how he wept that there were no more worlds to conquer. Oh, far astray, far mistaken! There was one world to conquer yet, to which that conqueror was a slave—a world to overcome for which the arms of Alexander were of no avail. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."—*A. K. H. B.*

Our Victorious Weapon.—Value of this text as the speech of an aged, experienced disciple. Compare our feeling if it had been the utterance of a young man. We should say that he did not know life, or that he was visionary and impulsive. But St. John looked back over many years of conflict, and many scenes of struggle and victory; and *he* may commend to us a weapon which he has found in every way efficient.

I. **What is the design which the world has upon us?**—We are represented as trying to overcome it. Then what is it trying to do? Born into the world, we might have said that surely the world ought to be our law. And yet we know that we are superior to the world. It should be under us, as the creatures are. It should be our servant, to help us in doing the will of God. Illustrate by things good as servants that are bad as masters—water, fire, wealth, pleasure, the world regarded morally. The difficulty is that some of these servants are always trying to get to be masters. That makes our conflict with the world. It wants to be master. The general conflict is represented in the individual; the world fights to gain authority in some one direction, and a man becomes a miser, a drunkard, or vicious. Conceive a man ruled by the world. Is that a true man? Social science, philosophy, and religion all say, No, a man must rise above the world. And Christ alone effectually shows man how to do it.

II. **Is it left with us to decide whether or no we will resist, and try to overcome the world?**—In one sense it is. That is the great term of our probation here—will you be ruled by the world or by God? To you, shall the world be master or servant? This is especially pressed on attention in early manhood.

But, in another sense, it is *not* left to us. We are urged by such impressive considerations to strive to overcome, that we are scarcely *manly* if we do not so strive. Illustrate by such things as: proofs about us of the ruin following world-triumphs; the high, and sole, claims of God to our love and service; the light of that better world where God *only* is loved and served; the testimony of those who have lived God-ruled lives. As *Christians*, no sort of option is left to us; we are actually, we are deeply, pledged to the carrying on of this warfare.

III. **With what weapon may we have the assurance of victory?**—Picture Bunyan's "Christian," going through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and betaking himself to the weapon of "All-prayer." Here the great sword is called "Our Faith." The world can only overcome by dimming and unvitalising God, and so loosening from us the sense of His claims and relations. The chance of the world lies in the absence of God from our thought, and from our love. Men can only sin when at heart they say, "The Lord shall not see." Then our hope of conquering lies in our keeping God in our love, and thought, and trust. Abraham conquered, because he thought of God as Him "before whom I walk." Moses conquered, because he persisted that the "Presence" should go with him. David conquered, because he could say, "I have set the Lord always before me." That is precisely the work of faith. The faith of God *in Christ, the human Christ*, is the faith that keeps God closely and directly related to our daily life. Only let faith keep God near, as we do our business, as we gather up our profits, as we go to and fro in our households, then the world shall never overcome us; we shall surely overcome the world. Observe a distinction. Is this commending a *general* faith in God, as being just, and strong, and wise, and good? Yes, it is; but it is much more. It is a commending of what must be the foundation, and the constant daily support, of such faith,—the faith of *God in Christ*; in God revealed, manifested in the human life of the Son; the faith of God, who was "in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 4. *Faith overcoming the World.*

I. **What is the true notion of conquering the world?**—Our notion of being victorious in life is when each man, according to his own ideal of what is best, manages to wring that ideal out of a reluctant world. A man desires conspicuous notoriety and fame. But what is the teaching of this epistle? Following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ Himself, the poor man, the beaten man, the unsuccessful man, may yet say, "I have overcome the world." What does that mean? Well, it is built upon this: the world, meaning thereby the sum-total of outward things, considered as apart from God—the world and God we make to be antagonists to one another. And the world woos me to trust to it, to love it; crowds in upon my eye and shuts out the greater things beyond; absorbs my attention, so that if I let it have its own way I have no leisure to think about anything but itself. And the world conquers me when it succeeds in hindering me from seeing, loving, holding communion with and serving my Father-God. On the other hand, I conquer it when I lay my hand upon it, and force it to help me get nearer Him, to get more like Him, to think more often of Him, to do His will more gladly and more constantly. The one victory over the world is to bend it to serve me in the highest things—the attainment of a clearer vision of the Divine nature, the attainment of a deeper love to God Himself, and of a more glad consecration and service to Him. That is the victory, when you can make the world a ladder to lift

you to God. Rule the world by making it help you to be wiser, gentler, nobler, more gracious, more Christ-like, more Christ-conscious, more full of God, and more like to Him, and then you will get the deepest delight out of it.

II. **The method by which this victory over the world, of making it help us to keep the commandments of God, is to be accomplished.**—The true victory over the world is won by a new life, born of and kindred with God; that life is kindled in men's souls through their faith; and the faith which kindles that supernatural life, the victorious antagonist of the world, is the definite, specific faith in Jesus as the Son of God. You can conquer the world if you will trust in Jesus Christ, because such trust will bring you into constant, living, loving contact with the great Conqueror. I can appropriate Christ's conquest to myself if I trust Him. The might of it, and some portion of the reality of it, passes into my nature in the measure in which I rely upon Him. So if we join ourselves to Him by faith, and bring into our daily life, in all its ignoble effort, in all its little duties, in all its wearisome monotonies, in all its triviality, the thought, the illuminating thought, of the victorious Christ, our Companion and our Friend—*in hoc signo vinces*—in this sign thou shalt conquer. They that keep hold of His hand see over the world and all its falsenesses and fleetingnesses. They that trust in Jesus are more than conquerors by the might of His victory. You can conquer the world if you will trust Jesus Christ, because your faith will bring into the midst of your lives the grandest and most solemn and blessed realities. Faith is the true anæsthesia of the soul—the thing that deadens it to the pains and the pleasures that come from this fleeting life. Get near to Jesus Christ by thought, and love, and trust. Trust to Him and to the great love that gave itself for you. And then bring Him into your life, by daily reference to Him of it all; and by cultivating the habit of thinking about Him as being present with you in the midst of it all; and so, holding His hand, you will share in His victory.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

The Victory of Faith.—Men acknowledge that the world is a place of conflict, but they often mistake the nature of the conflict, and the nature of the weapon that should be employed in it.

I. **They mistake the nature of the conflict.**—They look upon it as a battle with poverty, with ignorance, or with weakness. But a victory over all these does not mean a victory over care, or sorrow, or death. But the apostle tells us that the true enemy is not in the world, nor in the things that are in the world, but rather in the world within the heart. The enemy is not poverty, but desire; not obscurity, but lust. He who overcomes the world is not he who paves his way from poverty to wealth, but he who gets rich by the penuriousness and parsimony of his spirit; not he who has made his way to the highest places of earth, but he who has risen into the true knowledge and purity of God. The true victory lies in the vanquishing of the heart's desires.

II. **The weapon is mistaken also.**—Industry will overcome poverty, and knowledge obscurity; but if these are not the foes, then must we try another weapon. Even in the common aspect of life faith is needed. A man cannot do well who secretly disbelieves in the work he is doing. So to conquer within we must believe in goodness. And not only in goodness in the abstract; it is faith in a person which the apostle tells us will overcome the world. Faith in great principles has done much. But for the greatest and most permanent success we must have faith in goodness guaranteed, illustrated, and emphasised in the life and death of a person. Here then comes the glory of Christ's life, that it is precisely the emphasis of all faith in goodness.—*W. B. Carpenter, D.D.*

Vers. 4, 5. *Faith a Moral Power.*—Faith may be described as a preferring of some future and unseen good to a present and visible one, on the authority of some one whom we had reason to think good and wise. And religious faith consists in preferring future to present good things, on the authority of God Himself—that is, of One who is perfectly wise and good. Christian faith has this advantage over simple religious faith, in the more general sense of the word, that having obtained clearer and fuller notions of God's perfections, it is rendered stronger and more triumphant over temptations. Christian faith, or the faith that Jesus is the Son of God, gives us so much clearer and fuller notion of God, that it makes us know both Him and ourselves, and love Him, far better than we could do without it. This, then, is the faith that overcometh the world; for it is a faith that looks to an eternal reward, and it is founded on such a display of God's love and holiness, that the Christian may well say, "I know in whom I have believed." Conceive any one of us, old or young, having this faith, and do we not feel sure that it must overcome the world? Do we not feel sure that all temptations must be powerless against him who is heartily persuaded of what God has done, and will do for him, who looks forward to the kingdom of heaven, and knows and feels by whose blood it has been thrown open to him? Do we not see clearly, and do not our own hearts tells us, that if temptations are too strong for us, it is because our faith is weak.—*Dr. T. Arnold.*

Ver. 6. *The Threefold Witness.*—"By water and blood." "It is the Spirit that beareth witness." It is important that the mind should not be confused by the suggestions of ver. 7, which brings in the doctrinal term "Holy Ghost." It is probable that ver. 8 precisely represents the thought to which St. John wishes to give expression, and that no reference to the third person of the Divine Trinity is intended. St. John's mind was not so occupied with the work of the Holy Ghost as was the mind of St. Paul. St. John's whole interest was absorbed in the *person* of Christ, and his point here is, that faith in Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, is the faith that is overcoming, and will overcome, the world. It is strictly relative to his subject to point out how well founded that faith in Christ is. There are *three* witnesses; two are usually regarded as sufficient. And these three altogether agree in their testimony. But what precisely is it that these witnesses testify to? Not generally to Jesus Christ, but specifically to Jesus Christ *as the Son of God.* They are three witnesses to the *human sonship of the Divine Son.* When once this is grasped, the reason for mentioning them here is understood. That they are witnesses "*in earth*" (ver. 8) sufficiently proves that the Holy Ghost is not meant. What St. John says is really this: The witness of the "water"—that is, of Christ's baptism—was the miraculous attestation of His Sonship by a voice from heaven. The witness of the "*Spirit*"—that is, Christ's own spirit, the tone and temper of His daily life—was a most persuasive exhibition of His Sonship. The witness of the "*blood*"—that is, of His "resisting unto blood" all temptation to unsonlike doings, His self-sacrifice for the sake of obedient sonship—was an all-convincing proof of His Sonship. Surely, then, we have all-sufficient grounds for believing that Jesus is the Son of God. Then He *is* what we *ought to be.* And trying to be what He is will prove for us the "overcoming of the world"—first the world within, and then the world without.

Ver. 8. *Water and Blood.*—The *Rev. W. M. Sinclair, D.D.*, in Ellicott's Commentary, gives suggestively the more usual explanation of these symbolic terms. "Water" and "blood" are referred to as two of the three

great witnesses, or sets of evidence, for Christ. They are symbols, and look back to two of the most characteristic and significant acts of His personal history. The one is His baptism, the other His cross. Why His baptism? The baptism of John was the seal of the law. It was the outward sign by which those who repented at his preaching showed their determination to keep the law no longer in the letter only, but also in the spirit. Jesus, too, showed this determination. Baptism in water was His outward sign and seal to the Old Testament: that He had not come to destroy, but to fulfil the law; not to supersede the prophecies, but to claim them. It was to show that in Him the righteousness and purification which the law intended was to be a reality, and through Him to be the law of His kingdom. Thus it pointed to all the evidence which this Old Testament could possibly afford Him; and, through the Old Testament, it pointed to the dispensation of the Father. Thus, when this most symbolic act was complete, the almighty Giver of the old law or covenant was heard saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." "Blood" in the same way refers to the special work of Christ Himself—the work of reconciliation and atonement by His death and passion, the realisation of all that the sacrifices and types of the former state of religion had meant. That He was the true sacrifice was proved by the perfection of His life, by the signs and wonders with which He had attracted and convinced His followers, by the fulfilment of prophecy, by the marvels of His teaching, by the amazing events which had happened at the different crises of His life, by His resurrection and ascension, and by the confession of all who knew Him well that He was the Word made flesh, full of grace and truth, and with the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 9—13

God's Gift in a Person.—All the mystery of redemption will not go into a sentence. And yet very helpful sentences are graciously given. If we would know, as briefly as possible, what are the essentials of salvation, this paragraph answers, "Having the Son." How limited this is! It confines human hope to one absolute condition. How comprehensive it is! It concerns man as man, recognising no merely intellectual, or social, or sectarian distinctions. Anywhere, everywhere, the man who *has the Son* has life. There is full, free, present salvation for all in Christ the Son.

I. **God's gift to us—"eternal life."**—The young rich ruler asked, "What good thing can I do that I may inherit eternal life?" He had the Pharisaic notion, that it was the reward of doing some extraordinary thing. It is often regarded as only continuous, never-ending life. But the Scriptures put other and larger meanings into the term. The word is applied to God: "the eternal God is thy refuge." To the power of God: "His eternal power and Godhead." To Israel: "an eternal excellency." Unseen things are eternal. We read of "an eternal weight of glory"; "an eternal purpose"; "eternal salvation"; "eternal judgment"; "eternal redemption"; "the eternal Spirit"; "eternal inheritance"; "eternal fire." And the Revised Version has "an eternal sin." Evidently the word chiefly means what we mean by "spiritual," "divine," or perhaps "the highest, intensest, conceivable." Quality is indicated by the term, and not mere size or length. There is a time-figure in the word, as there is a material figure in all words, *e.g.* Spirit, God. The length of time that a thing will last is a well-recognised *note of value*. So the term "eternal life" makes us think of the highest form of life that is possible to man. Our

thought of life is a gradual ascent—vegetable, animal, human, mental, social, political, then spiritual, which is the life of God so far as it can be man's. We vainly try to conceive of *Divine* life, the life of God, which is the top of the ascent. What thoughts may we have concerning the gift God bestows? 1. If He arranges to give it, we must supremely need it. As men we cannot be content to stop short of the best that is possible to us. What is within the limit of human attainment? Culture of body; culture of mind; culture of character. Nothing more. Something more is attainable as the gift of God. He seals our faith with the gift of Divine, spiritual life. 2. If He arranges to give it, we cannot otherwise get it. The young rich ruler a type. What could he get by means of works? Life is only quickened by the contact of life. Regeneration. The best possible—the Divine in man—is a gift of God as truly as was the first life for Adam.

II. **God's gift in a person.**—"This life is in His Son." Not merely entrusted to Him, but actually *in* Him. If so, we can see it in Him. We can know it by watching Him. Can we then know what the Divine, eternal life in the soul of man is? *There it is, in Christ. That* life is in the Son. If so, there is a mystery in Christ. The life in Him is *for us.* It is a life that imparts life, a life that quickens life. Illustrate how we change into the spirit of those with whom we live. What, then, is that soul-contact that brings to us Christ's eternal life? Illustrate by grafting or budding trees.

III. **That person imparting the gift.**—"He that hath the Son hath life." Having Christ—what can that mean? 1. In what senses are we said to have *things*? (1) We have material things, by the personal use of them. (2) We have persons, by the pleasure of their affection and intercourse. (3) We have knowledge, when our mind for itself grasps truth. (4) We have principles, when they act within us as motives. So the idea of "having Christ" is appropriation, personal relation. 2. In what sense did the disciples "have Christ"? Daily and hourly He was in the circle of their life and thought, the shaper of their life and thought. Illustrate from Bethany. Martha had Christ to serve. Mary had Christ to love and listen to. Lazarus had Christ to receive life from. See the test presented to the young rich ruler. "You have much wealth. Give it up, and have Me." 3. How is "having" related to "believing"? "Having" fixes thought on one part of believing—the last part. Believing includes: (1) intellectual apprehension of a statement; (2) heart-feeling of the importance of the statement; (3) active effort to realise personal interest in it. Take the statement, "Christ died for sinners." "Having" sets out prominently the third element—the effort to appropriate. "Having" says "He died for *me*." See then that no faith in a creed will do; no works will do; only trust in, and love to, a person brings us life. The life we supremely need is just that life of sonship that was in Christ. The life of sonship to God is the eternal life. To have Christ is to have life, *i.e.* to have Divine acceptance, with Him—to have the spirit of sonship with Him. Not to have Christ is death. Dead in trespasses and sins. Dead in self-will. Dead as in the wrath of God.

The Life in God.—"The Christian creed is here reduced to a very small compass: the gift of eternal life, and the dependence of that life upon His Son. Eternal life does not here mean the mere continuance of life after death, whether for good or evil: it is the expression used throughout St. John's writings for that life in God, thought of without reference to time, which can have no end, which implies heaven, and every possible variety of blessedness, and which consists in believing in God the Father, and in His Son. Its opposite is not annihilation, but the second death, existence in exclusion from God." "Having the Son'

is His dwelling in the heart by faith—a conscious difference to human life which transforms its whole character. "Having life" is the birth of the new man within, which can never die."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 10. *The Dishonouring Character of Unbelief.*—It makes God to seem a liar, a deceiver, one who makes statements for which there is no ground, and promises which can but disappoint. We can do no greater dishonour to a brother-man than *fail to trust him*, to believe his word, to rely upon his promise. Human unbelief is sometimes presented as the source of moral mischief in a man's character and life, and as the cause of his deprivation of privilege. There are a thousand things that man "cannot enter into" "because of his unbelief." But here quite another side of the evil influence of unbelief is presented. It dishonours God. It prevents men from putting that trust in Him which He seeks, which is the invitation and persuasion of His love, and which is so firmly based on His goodness and faithfulness. Unbelief proclaims God to be *untrustworthy*. But this brings up the question, whether the evidences of God's truth, and righteousness, and goodness, are sufficiently abundant, and clear, and impressive, to make absolutely unreasonable all human unbelief. And this ground may reasonably be taken. The appeals for God may be made—(1) to every part of man's nature; (2) to every matter of man's concern; (3) to every page of man's history. Take the best men who have appeared in all the ages; they have believed in God. Take the most perplexing and involved circumstances of God's people; He has always fulfilled His promise, and led them safely through. Take the promises which lie thick on the page of the word, like stars in the midnight sky; there cannot one be found which stands unfulfilled in the history of God's people. He always "remembers His word."

The Method of Faith.—Court of justice, judge, jury, counsels, reporters, listeners. The culprit—his trial will come on. His fate depends on the evidence which will be adduced—not on public opinion or feeling. There is a tribunal in every breast. "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the works of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another."

I. **The process which transfers the gospel and all its living, saving power into the soul.**—"He that believeth." 1. *Our attention must be thoroughly arrested.* This is done by two distinct methods—by striking and forcible means, by gradual influence and development. *A mirage*—a whole scene pictured in the heavens. Gradual influence—father's prayers, Saul of Tarsus and Timothy. 2. *We must realise in ourselves and for ourselves the gospel and its influence.* Every man is intensely individual, and the things which affect us so are the most real. Reading of the dangers of others will produce an impression, but when in danger ourselves the feeling is most intense. The father whose five little children were in the railway carriages which broke loose was most anxious for their safety. "I am crucified with Christ to the world." "Fellowship with His sufferings." Look into that great soul, and you will see Golgotha, the cross, the suffering Saviour. Again, "Christ in you the hope of glory." Resurrection, ascension, intercession, benediction. 3. *There must be felt an abiding presence and influence.* There are momentous things engraved on our minds, but they only come up occasionally. "Abide in Me, and I in

you, so that ye be My disciples." "Let that therefore abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning." Not a passing breath, but the functions of breathing; not the drop of blood which passes through the veins, but the heart which circulates it. "I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one."

II. **The inward testimony to our salvation.**—1. *The accord of truth with the moral demands of our nature.* Let us not treat our souls as if they were blank or empty, but as morally sentient. Our whole nature, physical and mental, is based on the same principle. "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, they are life." Repent, believe, pray, obey, love; the soul says "Amen" to all these. 2. *The presence of the Spirit and the attestation.* "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." The appeal of the loving, confiding child to the witnessing of the father. "And because ye are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." The Spirit gives the assurance of faith.

III. **The accord of the verdict with the soul.**—We shall stand soon before the judgment-seat of Christ. "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel." "Also now behold my witness is in heaven, my record is on high."—*Anon.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13—17.

The Rights of the New-begotten Sons.—Ver. 13 recalls to mind the explanation St. John gives of his purpose in writing his gospel. "But these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, ye may have life in His name." Life is St. John's great word, and by it he means that life as a son of God, in loving and obedient relations with the eternal Father, which is seen in Christ the Son, and becomes ours as by faith we are linked with that Son so as to receive His life. When we are thus made sons, we enter upon the possession of three rights or privileges, and we ought thankfully to use them.

I. **The right to eternal life.**—The right to live a higher kind of life than can be attained by other men,—a spiritual life, a human-divine life like that which the Lord Jesus lived; for His life on the earth is precisely described as the "eternal life." That is not life in heaven: it is the Christ-life lived on earth. But the right to this *life* involves the right to everything that is needed for sustaining, developing, and perfecting the life. If God calls any one into being, His creative act implies a continuous providential act, for the well-being of the creature made. So St. Paul tells us that *all things* are at the command and use of the sons of God.

II. **The right to expect answers to prayers** (vers. 14, 15).—The prayers here thought of are those bearing relation to the believer's own life, circumstance, and need. Answer to prayer, following on attention to prayer, is involved in Fatherhood and sonship. A father who neither hears, nor heeds, nor answers, his children's requests is no father at all. If God be our Father, He must heed and answer all who keep child-like souls.

III. **The right to intercede for others** (vers. 16, 17).—The very fact that there is a limit to Christian intercession asserts the right to intercede *within the limits.* And this is the right which belongs to the brotherhood. Brothers ought to be concerned with brothers' welfare, and be ready with all sympathy and help in times of frailty and trouble.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 13. *Knowing that we have Life.*—The arguments and persuasions of St. John were intended to bring a personal confidence and assurance to the believers. He wanted them to *know* that they had the eternal life.

I. **Personal assurance is possible.**—But too often it is assurance founded on mere *feelings*. St. John's assurance is founded on *facts* and *truths*. Emotional assurance is of but little value: it seldom does more than soothe the soul to a sleep of self-satisfaction and indifference; and it has a strangely evil tendency to make men think themselves the special favourites of God, and to despise others. Assurance founded on facts and truths has a graciously bracing influence; it ennobles a man, makes him feel like a co-worker with God, and want to be an *active* co-worker. And it brings the man nearer to his fellows, because, taking form as assurance of sonship, it cannot fail to bring on the responsibility of brotherhood.

II. **Personal assurance is to be sought.**—It is not only a desirable attainment; it is a *necessary* one. Upon it the *strength* of the Christian life depends. But it is even more important to see that upon it the brightness and cheeriness of the Christian life depend. The uncertain man is depressed, and can put no joy into his work. No man should rest anywhere short of the "full assurance of faith."

III. **Personal assurance is gained through apprehension of higher truth.**—Not in the most hopeful way through experience, because experience always has too much of the variableness of *self* in it. Assurance comes by soul-growth, through spiritual and mental apprehensions of the higher truth. And that can be fully apprehended when we recognise that the higher truth brings the fuller knowledge of God, and in the going out of ourselves to ever higher and worthier thoughts of God we gain our best confidences and satisfactions.

The Knowledge of Eternal Life.—This being the declared object of this epistle, we are not surprised to find the words "know" and "eternal life" conspicuous. The whole epistle is occupied with the *signs of sonship*. *Light*, *love*, and *life* are the grand words which interpret the epistle, and under which all these evidences of the new nature may be arranged. God is here directly declared to be light and to be love, and it is everywhere implied that He is also life. Hence His own children must partake of His light, and love, and life, because partakers of His nature.

I. **Light** is here used as the equivalent for higher knowledge, as darkness is for ignorance. The child of God walks in light. Light is a revealer. Hence he knows God, knows himself and his sin, and knows the truth. He that is in darkness knows not God, denies his sin, denies Jesus, and denies the truth, embraces a lie, etc. The signs of being in the light are mainly these three: recognition of *sin*, belief and confession of *Jesus*, and knowledge of *God*. Of many truths we may yet be in ignorance or doubt, but of these the true child of God must be assured.

II. **Love**, this is the synonym for a pure, unselfish affection and benevolence. Love is found in the world—natural affection, selfish affection, the love of sympathy and of complacency. But this love is not of this world; like the warmth of the sun, it is the outgoing of something that aims to bless others rather than benefit ourselves. "He that loveth is born of God and knoweth God." This love is expansive, expulsive, and explosive. It enlarges the heart, it expels evil, and it demands expression and action. It expels the love of sin, the love of the world, and the hatred of man. It demands vent in benevolent action and in confession of Jesus as Lord.

III. **Life.** Here we touch another class of mysteries. The life-principle of God is in the believer, and is opposed

to death. Hence there is: 1. A quickening power—obedience. 2. A sanctifying power—purification. He that is born of God doth not commit sin, and cannot sin—observe the force of the Greek present tense, continued action—*doth not go on sinning.* There is that in him which constrains him to *do righteousness* and put away iniquity. He has affinity with God. He purifies himself, even as Christ is pure. No sinner ought to be in ignorance of the way of salvation with the gospel of John before him. No saint should be in doubt about his saved state with the first epistle of John before him. To be saved one has only to believe on Jesus as the Saviour, to receive the gift of God's love. The disciple has only to examine himself as to whether he is in the light, the love, the life of God. If he sees and confesses his sin; if he accepts Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God; if he finds a love of God and of the brethren which expels the love of sin, of the world, and of self; if he feels the life of God impelling him to obey the commands of God, to renounce sin, and to live for God,—all this is the work of God, and of Him alone.—*Anon.*

Ver. 14. *The Condition of all Answers to Prayer.*—The one condition is repeated again and again, as if St. John foresaw with what difficulty Christians through all the ages would realise it. All his effort was directed to persuading men to believe fully in the *Sonship* of Christ. He says that he wrote to them precisely as those who *professed* to believe on the name of the *Son* of God. He wrote to them in order that he might persuade them *really* to believe on the name of the *Son* of God. The life is in the *Son.* It is not "he that hath Christ hath life." It is, "he that hath the *Son* hath life, and he that hath not the *Son* of God hath not life." And this is the ground of our confidence in prayer—*we have the Son*; and when a man has the Son, he has the sonship; and in the quiet, happy trust of his sonship, he is as sure that his heavenly Father hears and answers prayer, as any happy loving child is in an earthly father's home. Does God answer prayer? That child, who is a child indeed, never asks the question, and never likes to have such questions asked. He says, with deepest feeling, "Don't ask. He is my Father." "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask Him?" But there is a particular matter in St. John's mind. The one thing he is urging is the "love of the brethren," which we must feel if we love the Father, and have in us the mind of the only begotten Son. If we love them, we shall want to do something for them; and then we shall be sure to intercede for them, to ask things of God in their behalf. And we may ask with confidence of answer, if we have the spirit of sons, because we shall only ask what is in harmony with God's will, and only ask in a becoming spirit. The prayer of the brotherhood, the prayer of the family for one another, is evidently in St. John's mind, as is clear from vers. 16, 17. It is true that answer to prayers for ourselves rests on the same condition; but it comes freshly to us to find that our *intercessions* are conditioned on our maintaining our sonship.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 18—21.

Things about which we ought to be sure.—The expression "we know," as indicating something that is unquestionable, something that is settled and indisputable, something which has been so confirmed by evidence, observation, and experience, that it has become a persuasive power on our life, is applied to three things: 1. The actual fact that, the children of God do not sin wilfully.

2. The actual fact, that those who have not the new life in Christ do sin wilfully.
3. The spiritual fact, that the new life we have is a spiritual life communicated to us through faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God. St. John states these three things that we ought to *know*, as a kind of summary of his epistle. We ought then to know—

I. **The actual fact that the children of God do not sin wilfully.**—"We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not." If we treat this expression with simple common sense, it will occasion no difficulty. No doctrine of human sinlessness is suggested. It can be said of every child who is in right relations in a Christian home that he "sinneth not." Such a child has no sort of disposition to do any wrong thing, and, wilfully, never does any wrong thing. He must lose the sweet spirit of his sonship ere it can be possible for him to do anything to grieve his father or his mother. And he who is born of God, and stands fully in the sonship, never wants to do wrong, to grieve the heavenly Father. He wants to find fitting expression for his life, and he never can find it save in submissive and loving obediences, and kindly services, and righteous-doing. He *cannot sin*, for that would be to be unnatural. The Revised Version gives an alteration of the second clause of ver. 18 which seems to explain how it is that the man born of God does not commit sin. "But he that was begotten of God keepeth him [margin, himself], and the evil one toucheth him not." This, however, introduces quite a new subject, and the watchfulness of a man over himself is much more in the line of St. John's thought here, than any reference to the preserving power of Christ. "The child of God keeps himself in the estate of a child of God simply." "The true ideal frame is the absence of wilful sin."

II. **The actual fact that those who have not the new life in Christ do sin wilfully.**—Ver. 19: "The whole world lieth in the evil one." Lieth in his power, because, there being no new life, there is no steadfastly set will towards obedience and righteousness. It is just as natural for the man with only the earthly life to please himself, as it is for the man with the spiritual life to please God. Then St. John says, if it is thus natural for everybody to act wilfully, and to please themselves, then we may assure our hearts that we have experienced the great change, and are of God, if we never can think of acting wilfully or wickedly, if we cannot bear the idea of pleasing ourselves, when so doing can in any way be unpleasing to God. "We know that we are of God," because our contrast with the world is so strongly marked.

III. **The spiritual fact, that the new life we have is a spiritual life communicated to us through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**—Ver. 20: "And we are in Him that is true, even in His Son, Jesus Christ." The idea of St. John may be made somewhat clearer by recalling what St. Paul could say he *knew*. "I live, yet not I, Christ liveth in me." "I knew a man in Christ." It is the Christian mystery that a Divine life was in Christ, and found its expression through all human activities and relations, guaranteeing a life in absolute conformity with the will of God. That Divine life is imparted to believers, and they become, within the creaturely limitations, what Christ was, men in whom is a spiritual and Divine life, which, finding expression in all the details of life, enables them to live lives free from wilful sin. "We have in these last verses a final emphasis laid on the fundamental principles on which the epistle rests: that we through the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ have fellowship with God; that this fellowship protects us from sin, and establishes us in a relation of perfect opposition to the world."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 18. *Keeping Ourselves.*—The Revised Version reads this verse thus, "But he that was begotten of God keepeth him, and the evil one toucheth him not," with the marginal addition "himself," instead of "him." The idea may therefore be either "the Son of God preserves him," or "he watchfully keepeth himself." The latter seems more precisely in the line of St. John's teaching here. He is speaking of the virtue that lies in the new Divine life of the soul. "Whosoever is born of God sinneth not"; for it is in the very nature of that life to be jealous of its own integrity and purity. This point may be opened out and illustrated on the following lines.

I. **Every creature having life has life in trust.**—It is the one thing which every animal and every man properly regards as his chief treasure. "Skin after skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." How much more must the spiritual and Divine life be a trust.

II. **Keeping here means guarding, but much more than guarding.**—It is quite true that the Christian is "kept by the power of God," but it is also true that God's keeping is effective when it goes along with his keeping himself. How little a parent can do for his boy if the boy will do nothing for himself.

III. **Guarding must be the man's own work, but for it he may accept auxiliary aids.**—He must "work out his own salvation," but he may and should realise how fully the Divine help is at his command.

IV. **He only knows his particular perils, and the self-weaknesses that bear such relation to his perils.**—It is in the spiritual as in the physical world. A man gets to know his own body, and learns how to preserve health, by the wise management of himself. But the question may be asked, Is there usually such self-knowledge in the spiritual life as inspires a man to this "keeping himself."

Ver. 20. *The Gospel of the Incarnation.*—St. John simply mentions the great things that lie inside this fact: "The Son of God is come."

I. **By His coming He has "given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true."**—This does not mean that Christ gives men any new intellectual power, that He adds to the faculties of the mind any more than to the senses of the body. "Understanding" here signifies rather the *means of knowing*, the power of understanding. The Son of God has given us the means of knowing God. By word and life He has given us ideas about Fatherhood, holiness, purity, kindness, and love, that we had not before. The horizon of language has been widened, and its heaven lifted higher than before.

II. **For what purpose has Christ given us these new ideas and opened the eyes of our understanding?**—That we may "know Him that is true," even God. It is *needful* that we should know God. In Christ you will find the truth about God.

III. **We know that the Son of God is come, and we are in Him that is true, in His Son Jesus Christ**—*i.e. in Christ we are in God.*—Union with Christ by faith, obedience, and love is perfect union with God.

IV. **The Son of God is come, and to be *in Him* is to have eternal life.**—"This is the true God [the God in Christ], and eternal life." Christ *tells* the truth: believe Him. Christ is the *life*: accept Him.—*J. Morgan Gibbon.*

Ver. 21. *The Ever-recurring Temptation to Idolatry.*—"As the epistle is addressed to Christians, this last exhortation to keep themselves from idols could not refer to gross idolatry; such

a dehortation would most inharmoniously fit the tenor of the whole document. The εἴδωλα are rather the ideas of God entertained by the false prophets of whom the apostle has spoken, the antichrists, who, because they have not the Son, have not the Father also, without therefore being atheists in the common meaning of the word. All the heretics of that time would serve God. Against them is held up the proposition that οὗτος, that is, this God revealed in Christ, is alone the true God; all else is an εἴδωλον. But not only is God robbed of His honour, not only does man serve a false god when he seeks another god than the God revealed in Christ, but he also trifles away his own salvation, for this only is eternal life—he that hath Him hath thereby life" (*Eric Haupt*). But while it may be helpful thus to follow the precise meaning and allusion of St. John, it is permissible, for homiletic purposes, to follow the suggestions of his words, and we may therefore recognise the fact that the temptation to idol-service in some form has been the temptation of men in every age, and is their temptation still.

Striking Contrasts.—This is the last of the contrasts of which the epistle is so full. We have had light and darkness, truth and falsehood, love and hate, God and the world, Christ and antichrist, life and death, doing righteousness and doing sin, the children of God and the children of the devil, the spirit of truth and the spirit of error, the believer untouched by the evil one, and the world lying in the evil one; and now at the close we have what in that age was the ever-present and pressing contrast between the true God and the idols. There is no need to seek far-fetched, figurative explanations of "the idols" when the literal meaning lies close at hand, is suggested by the contrast, and is in harmony with the known circumstances of the time.—*A. Plummer, D.D.*

Christian Idolatry.—The first commandment forbids us to have any god, but the one true God. The second forbids us to make any image or likeness of any created thing, for the purpose of bowing down to it and worshipping it. These two commandments may be regarded in a manner as parts of one and the same commandment. For there is hardly any way in which mankind have been drawn off from the worship of the one true God to the worship of false gods, so much as by the setting up of images, and the falling down to them, and worshipping them. (See book of Wisdom xiv. 12, "The devising of idols was the beginning of spiritual fornication, and the invention of them the corruption of life.") In the time of our Lord every nation, except the Jews, was sunk in idol-worship. The yoke of idolatry lay heavy upon every people, and nation, and language. After our Saviour's teaching, one might have thought things would have gone on better, at least in His own Church. But the same causes will ever produce the same effects. Instead of the images of heathen gods, which had been overthrown, the Churches after a time were again filled with the images of apostles, evangelists, martyrs, and other holy men. These were not introduced with any design of worshipping them. Yet they came to be worshipped. We may not be falling into this error, but we may have set up idols in our hearts, and this may prove to be a worse evil than bowing down before images. It is if, instead of keeping our souls pure, as befits temples of the Holy Ghost, we profane and pollute them to vain and perishable, or, as too many do, to abominable, things. The root and essence of idolatry is the worshipping and serving God's creatures more than God Himself. Whoever then serves any one of God's creatures more than he serves God—whoever loves any one of God's creatures more than he loves God—whoever makes any of God's creatures more an object of his thoughts, and allows it to fill a greater space in his

mind than God fills—that man is guilty of idolatry, in the spiritual and Christian sense of the word. When it is said, God's creatures, it is meant, not living creatures merely, but creatures of every kind—everything which God has made for us, or enabled us to make for ourselves—all the sweet and relishing things we can enjoy in this world—pleasures, honours, riches, comforts of every kind. Therefore, if any man is foolish and wicked enough to give up his heart to any one of these creatures, and suffers himself to be drawn away from serving God by it, he is an idolater in the sight of heaven. Then if the goods of this world may all become so many idols, luring our hearts away from God, then is the land full of idols of a thousand kinds—idols for all ages, for all classes, for all tempers, for all hearts. There are idols for the worldly-minded, and idols for the generous; idols for the intemperate, and idols for the prudent; there are idols for the affectionate; and again there are idols for the selfish. Young and old have their idols; married and unmarried have their idols; rich and poor have their idols. The covetous man is an idolater (Col. iii. 5). The insatiable and greedy man is an idolater. Mammon is not the only heathen god whose worship is carried on in the hearts of men to-day. What shall we say of Belial, the fleshliest spirit that ever seduced man to sin? He is the god of lust, of riot, of uncleanness, of unruliness. Or look at Moloch, the god of hatred and every fierce passion: has he no children, no worshippers, nowadays? Men who pay him the service he is best pleased with—the service of an envious, rancorous, malicious, and festered heart. But the commonest idol of all, which has the most constant, the devoutest worshippers, which reigns indeed in every heart, unless it has been cast out by the Spirit of God, is the idol of *self*. It is almost impossible to get rid of him, unless we starve him out. So long as we feed him and strengthen him by gratifying his wilfulness and whim, so long will he continue in possession. Nor will even starving him out be enough of itself, unless we add frequent prayer thereto. For this is the spirit of which our Lord said, that it goeth not out, except by prayer and fasting. Mortify yourselves therefore, brethren: strive to crush every feeling within you that would lift up its head against the will of God; strive to break the neck of your own will, and to make it bend meekly and patiently under the yoke of Christ.—*A. W. Hare, A.M.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER V.

Ver. 20. *The Deity of Christ.*—Two gentlemen were once disputing on the Divinity of Christ. One of them, who argued against it, said, "If it were true, it certainly could have been expressed in more clear and unequivocal terms." "Well," said the other, "admitting that you believed it, were you authorised to teach it, and allowed to use your own language, how would you express the doctrine to make it indubitable?" "I would say," said he, "that Jesus is *the true God*." "You are very happy, sir," rejoined the other, "in the choice of your words; for you have happened to hit upon the very words of inspiration. The apostle John, speaking of the Son, says, 'This is *the true God*, and eternal life.'" The Rev. Charles Buck says, "I was once arguing with a person on the same subject; and when I quoted the scripture, he was quite confounded, and said he was not previously aware that there was any such passage."

Ver. 21. *Christian Idols.*—This idea is a general and very comprehensive one: it embraces all things and everything which may be opposed to the God revealed in Christ, and to His worship in spirit and in truth. Pre-eminently, therefore, it embraces the delusive and vain idols of the Cerinthian Gnosticism, whether ancient or modern; but it includes also the idols and false mediators of superstition, to whom the confidence is transferred which is due only to God in Christ—be their name Madonna, or saints, or Pope, or priesthood, or good works, or pictures, or office, or church, or sacraments. The one Being in whom we have the "life eternal" is *Christ*. . . . And this Christ we possess through the *Spirit*

of God, whose marks and tokens are not priestly vestments, but faith and love. In this meaning the apostle's cry sounds forth through all the ages in the ears of all Christians, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." The holiest things may become a snare, if their letter is regarded, and not their spirit. Every Christian Church has a tendency to worship its own brazen serpents. Happy are they who have a Hezekiah to call them Nehushtan (a piece of worthless brass).—*Ebrard.*

Modern Forms of Idolatry.—In the Russo-Greek Church solid images are not permitted, and the symbols of faith are generally worthless pictures, made to represent images as much as permissible, by having stuffs wrought in thin gold or silver stuck upon the painting. The celebrated gate in the wall of the Kremlin is famous because a picture of this sort. "The Redeemer of Smolensk," as it is called, is suspended above the high archway of brick. With an opera-glass one can discern a representation of the typical face of Christ decked in golden garb and nimbus. Even in these degenerate days it is scarcely permitted that any one shall pass under this archway except uncovered. Jews and Mohammedans generally find some less sacred gate when they wish to enter the Kremlin—the Acropolis of Moscow. The Czar himself never passes by any other way, and never with his hat upon his head. But it is upon the outer side of the Voskreneski Gate, in the Kitai-Gorodi, or "Chinese town" of Moscow, that the most remarkable exhibition of religious feeling may be witnessed. Before the stout wall of brickwork which separates the outgoing from the incoming way is the Iberian Chapel (Iverskaya Chasovnia), architecturally nothing but a large-sized hut of stone, on a platform raised by two steps above the roadway. From morning till night this platform is thronged, and the chapel overflows with a crowd, chiefly composed of men, pressing, all bareheaded, and all with money in their hands, toward the narrow doorway of the little sanctuary. We were some time getting into the chapel, which will hold about ten people abreast, and is lighted by the flickering glare of a score of candles. There is a step at the farther end, and the wall opposite the door is resplendent with shining metal, except where the object of this extravagant devotion looks grimy through its framework of gold. On the left side of "the Iberian Mother of God," which is the name given to this commonplace daub, supposed to possess miraculous powers, stands a long-haired priest—now and then relieved by another long-haired priest—who, hour by hour, in the name of the tinselled and jewelled picture, and with blessings, consecrates the prayers and offerings of the faithful. Only the face of the Madonna is visible, and it is not easy to distinguish her features beneath the dust of years. But not a minute passes in which the rattle of money falling to the uses of the Russian Church is not heard, or in which lips are not pressed upon the framework, or upon the rudely wrought robes of beaten gold which conceal the picture to the neck. Surely no lower depth of superstitious degradation was ever reached in connection with Christian worship! One cannot be surprised that to a Turk a Russian seems to be an idolatrous worshipper of pictures. The refining explanation which the most enlightened fathers of the Greek Church offer concerning this exhibition is precisely of the sort, and differs only in degree, from that which might be offered for the idol-worshippers of more southern and eastern lands. The picture has no historic reputation. It was brought from Mount Athos, that pleasant wooded hill peopled with monkish drones. A sum of about £12,000 a year is collected, and from this the salary of the Metropolitan of Moscow is paid. Time was when in the ceremonies which precede Easter the Czar used to lead the donkey upon which the Patriarch of Moscow rode, carrying a sacred chalice, and a copy of the four gospels. Nowadays that ceremony is neglected, but we are given to understand that the Czar never enters Moscow without assisting the revenues of this high ecclesiastical officer by praying at the shrine of this "Iberian Mother of God."—*Fraser's Magazine.*

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN.

INTRODUCTION.

This epistle is anonymous, and it is a private letter which did not for some time gain a recognised place in the Canon. It is singular that its author should call himself "the elder," if he was the well-known and highly-honoured apostle John. No satisfactory reason has been given for his giving himself this particular name. All that can be said is, that the assumption of the title is consistent with the belief that he wrote this and the following epistle in advanced age—the title "elder" for himself matching the affectionate term "little children," which he used for those whom he addressed. He might wish to avoid the appearance of making a special claim as the only surviving apostle; and he may have been Divinely guided into dropping the apostolic name, which in its special sense had had its day, and adopting a name which was to be a permanent possession of the Church. "No ordinary presbyter would be likely to style himself ὁ πρεσβύτερος in the inscription of a letter."

The argument for the Johannine authorship is entirely based on a comparison of its contents, expressions, and tone with the first epistle and the gospel. The uncertainty of the argument lies in its being equally applicable to one of John's disciples, endowed with a double portion of his spirit. Of the thirteen verses of the shorter epistle, eight have close counterparts in the first. All that can safely be said is, that there are good reasons for assuming that it was written by the apostle John, and no good reasons for favouring any other assumption. If it holds the field uncertainly, still the Johannine authorship does hold the field.

The following summary of its character and scope has been given: "The apostle, who is probably staying at the same place as some of his correspondent's children, writes to a mother and her other children to express his sympathy and delight at the faith of the family, and to warn them against admitting false teachers into their circle. It contains noticeable definitions of love, antichrist, and of true and false believers. It also has a general lesson on the treatment of wilful depravers of Divine truth."

EVIL INFLUENCES IN FAMILY LIFE.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1. **The elder.**—Indicating both the writer's age and official position. **Elect lady.**—Or possibly, "the Elect Kyria," Kyria being a feminine form of κύριος, "lord," which was used as a name. But the A.V. is to be preferred. Some think that a community, or Church, is addressed; but the best point and interest of the epistle are realised if it be regarded as a private letter to an individual. It expresses the personal religious interest which the apostle felt in one particular family. *Beza's* note is: "Some think *Eclecta* a proper name, which I do not approve, because in that case the order of the words would have been, κυρίᾳ ἐκλεκτῇ, *To the Lady Eclecta.* Others think this name denotes the Christian Church in general. But that is disapproved, first, by its being a manner of speaking altogether unusual; secondly, by the apostle's expressly promising in the last two verses to come to her and her children; thirdly, by sending to her the salutation of her sister, whom also he calls *Eclecta.* I therefore think that this epistle was inscribed to a woman of eminence, of whom there were some here and there, who supported the Church with their wealth, and that he called her Elect, that is 'excellent,' and gave her the title of κυρίᾳ, 'lady,' just as Luke gave to Theophilus, and Paul gave to Festus, the title of κράτιστος, 'most excellent.' For the Christian religion does not forbid such honourable titles to be given, when they are due." For the apostolic use of the term "elect," compare 1 Pet. i. 1; 2 Tim. ii. 10. "Every Christian is elect, or chosen, out of the anti-Christian world into the kingdom of God." We are to understand that, as this lady was a person of influence, "deceivers" were insinuating themselves into her family, in order to lead her and her children away from the truth. "If the name of the matron is not given, it is not absurd to suppose that the dangers of the times, or family persecution, may have made it advisable that both her name and that of the writer should be withheld. The messenger would supply both deficiencies. **In the truth.**—Or, "in truth," *i.e.* sincerely; with Christian love, as distinct from personal or family affection. **Have known the truth.**—There is a particular interest in one another secured by a common experience of the power of saving truth. It is inferred that this lady was widely known, respected, and beloved.

Ver. 2. **Truth's sake.**—There was evidently something then commonly recognised as the standard Christian truth. It must have been that setting of truth concerning the person and redemptive work of Christ, which the apostles had given. From St. John's writings we gather that he was supremely anxious concerning the standard truth of Christ's *person.* **Dwelleth in us.**—This is true of *the truth,* and it is true if the truth be personified as Christ, who dwells in us by His Spirit (John xiv. 16). *Plummer* gives the sense of these verses thus, "The apostle and all believers love the elect lady and her children on account of the ever-abiding presence of Christ in the gift of the Spirit."

Ver. 3. **Grace.**—The free Divine favour of God. **Mercy.**—The Divine pitifulness towards man's infirmities. **Peace.**—The spirit of him who is the recipient of Divine grace, and dealt with in the Divine mercy. **Son of the Father.**—Observe the distinctness with which the Father is presented as another person than the Son. "Perfect independence, parallel equality, and mutual connection." **In truth and love.**—The element or sphere in which alone grace, mercy, and peace can have place. ἐν denotes the condition, circumstances, sphere, *in* which these blessings shall be enjoyed: "in truth," as revealed by Him, and received by you—the knowledge and faith of Christ; "in love," mutual between us and Him.

Ver. 4. **Walking in truth.**—Compare John viii. 12; 1 John i. 6, 7, ii. 6; 3 John 3, 4. St. John had recently met with some of the lady's children, and was glad to report the good impressions they had made upon him. "The elliptical mode of expression (ἐκ τῶν τέκνων) is rather common in St. John" (John i. 24, vii. 40, xvi. 17; Rev. ii. 10, v. 9, xi. 9). *Bengel* remarks that there must have been at least *four* children, for more than one were present with her, and more than one were absent.

Ver. 5. **New commandment.**—John xv. 12; 1 John ii. 7. **Love one another.**—Love, as here defined, must be love in its highest and most comprehensive sense, that of which mutual Christian love is an exemplification and exercise—the love of God and our neighbour. "Love is the Christian's moral disposition of mind, which embraces all other virtues and graces. It implies faith, because it is founded on Christian principle, and can only be tested

by a right belief. It implies purity, because it is modelled on the love of God, and has abjured the old man. It implies unselfishness, because it desires the good of the other for his own sake and God's. It implies humility, because it distrusts itself, relies on God, and thinks more of the other than of itself (compare John xiii. 14, xv. 12; 1 Cor. xiii.; Eph. v. 2; 1 Pet. iv. 8; 1 John iii. 11, 23, iv. 7, 21)" (*Sinclair*).

Ver. 7. **Come in the flesh.**—The veritable humanity of the Son of God is St. John's strong point. Reference is to the teaching afterwards formulated as the Gnostic heresy, that the "Man Christ Jesus" was only the appearance of a man, and not a real human being. **Deceiver.**—Either one who deceives himself, is deceived, or deceives others. **Antichrist.**—As opposing what is absolutely vital truth concerning the person of Christ. These teachers did not merely deny the fact of the Incarnation, but also the *possibility* of it. "They confess not Jesus Christ *as coming* in the flesh."

Ver. 8. **Have wrought.**—Apostolic teachings, which should bear fruit in steadfast loyalty to the truth, and righteous living in the inspiration of the truth. **Full reward.**—In that steadfastness and righteousness.

Ver. 9. **Hath not God.**—1 John ii. 23, v. 12. Only the true humanity of Christ can bring to man the true conception of God, and the true relations with God.

Ver. 10. **Bring not this doctrine.**—St. John provides a means of testing all who claimed the lady's hospitality as Christian teachers. Still it is true that the doctrine of the veritable humanity of Christ provides the true test of orthodoxy; and when that is rightly taught, the full moral influence of Christianity is efficiently secured. **Receive him not into your house.** This advice is given less for the lady's own sake than for the sake of her children. Such teachers specially seek to gain influence on the young, and they can readily influence them in private home life.

Ver. 11. **God speed.**—Or success in his mission. To sympathise with a false teacher is to condone his false doctrine. It should be clearly seen that St. John has in mind, not merely misguided persons, but persons who deliberately set themselves to the degrading of the Christian doctrine. We have to think of the false teachers of that age. The idea was that the Christian truth could be so presented as to give licence to immorality. It is against *this* that the apostles so vigorously contend. Mere variations in the forms of explaining and presenting the Christian truths should never be confounded with deliberate attempts to alter and deprave the Christian verities.

Ver. 12. **Joy may be full.**—In the interchange of Christian thoughts, and the assurance that malign influences had been successfully resisted.

The "Amen" is the addition of a copyist.

Note on Ancient Ink (*ver.* 12).—Pliny says, of the ink used by the Romans, that it was made of soot in various ways with burnt resin or pitch. "For this purpose they have built furnaces which do not allow the smoke to escape. The kind most commended is made in this way from pine-wood: it is mixed with soot from the furnaces or baths, and this they use for writing on rolls. Some also make a kind of ink by boiling and straining the lees of wine." The black matter of the cuttle-fish was also sometimes used for writing.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—3.

Loving for the Truth's Sake.—It is a little strange that St. John should here call himself "the elder," especially as that term had a recognised meaning in the early Church. It indicated the chief official position, and is probably a reproduction of the eldership of the synagogue. *Westcott* says, "In this connection there can be little doubt that it describes not age simply, but official position." It is not at all likely that St. John intended to allude to his advanced age, though that idea is supported by Döllinger in the following passage: "The use of the word in this epistle shows that he cannot have understood his title in the usual ecclesiastical sense, as though he were only one among many presbyters of a community. Clearly the writer meant thereby to express the singular and lofty position he held in the circle around him, as the teacher venerable for his old age, and the last of the apostles." His calling himself "*the* elder" (not "fellow-elder," as 1 Pet. v. 1) suggests that, while he put himself on the level of the elders, he could not fail to regard himself as *primus inter pares*. The language and the thought of the apostle are so Johannine that the authorship of St. John is almost assured.

I. **Christian love—love of others in Christ, and for Christ's sake—should be regarded as the human ideal of love.**—It is the highest thing attainable by humanity. It is only attainable when man is regenerated, quickened with a new, Divine life.

II. **Christian love is loving others for their own sake.**—It is not something different from ordinary human love. It is that glorified. It is as capable as ever of loving the lovely, of personal attachments.

III. **Christian love is loving others for the truth's sake.**—Or as we should express it, because of the common Divine life in them and us. It will be seen at once how this rises above personal love and family love, though it is in the same line. In all spheres the common life is the basis of the common love. Loving others has two objects to attain: 1. Personal enjoyment out of the loving. 2. Service rendered to those loved.

Vers. 4-13. *Peril in Going Onward.*—The point of this paragraph is given in the R.V. of ver. 9: "Whosoever goeth onward, and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son." The going onward against which St. John warns is advance *beyond* the revealed doctrine in Christ. There is a false progress as well as a true. St. John recognises gladly the Christian love of this lady and her family, and that it showed its proper signs of loyalty and obedience to Christ's truth. But in order that the love should be pure, that the commandments should be unimpaired, it was necessary to remember that nothing new could be added to the original message of Christ. Unauthorised *developments* of Divine revelation, such as are found in Gnostic or Agnostic systems, are always perilous. This lady must jealously guard her family against the pernicious influence of those who tamper with the truth, or would add to the truth. "These anti-Christian Gnostics were *advanced* thinkers: the gospel was all very well for the unenlightened, but they knew something higher. This agrees very well with what follows: by *advancing* they did not *abide*." There is an advance which involves desertion of first principles; and such an advance is not progress, but apostasy. 1. There is a "going onward" which is an *otherwise* growing. It is unusual. It is, to say the least, doubtful. It may be healthy. It will need watching. 2. There is a "going onward" which is an *out*-growing. As the boy outgrows his child-clothes, so a Christian may outgrow his child-forms of thought, and want new ways for expressing old principles and truths. This may be perfectly normal and natural, and liberty in this must be permitted; provision for this must be made. 3. There is a going onward which is an *in*-growing. A developing of the soul's life, which finds fitting outward expression in conduct and relations, and this is always hopeful and safe. Progress along the lines, and within the lines, is healthy. Progress beyond the lines, or aside the lines, needs most careful watching.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 4. *Walking in Truth.*—Pleasant to receive letters; a surprise to receive one from a minister. A lady, mentioned in a general way, without any specific name, received one. It was from a much-loved and honoured minister. What made him write that loving letter? He had heard something about her children that greatly pleased him. "I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth." Walking in truth: that our friends are walking in truth—that the children growing up around us are walking in truth—this is something to be glad about. By "walk" Scrip-

ture means our way of living, and acting, and sustaining relations, and meeting obligations. The figure attaches to the familiar way of regarding human life as a *pilgrimage*. The following ideas may be included in the term "walking in truth":—

I. **Walking straight.**—A dying minister drew down to him one of his people, a man whose business relations were shaky, and solemnly said, as his parting word, "William, go straight." Bunyan illustrates how the pilgrims are drawn aside from the straight path. Illustrate "walking straight" by the example of Joseph.

II. **Walking steadily.**—The idea of uprightness with steadfastness. Head uplifted. Eyes looking up. Contrast the drunkard, undecided, wavering man. Illustrate by the example of Samuel.

III. **Walking with a purpose.**—A man's conduct depends upon his aim. He walks persistently who is *going somewhere*. Illustrate by the example of Joshua. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

IV. **Walking according to directions.**—As given in the great moral guide-book. Illustrate by psalm. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" "Lamp to feet, light to path." Give Wilberforce's figure of the strangers and pilgrims who are passing through, and the men of the world who settle down. We should be those who are *passing* through; and because they want to pass through well, endeavour to "walk in truth."

Ver. 12. *Presence and Correspondence.*—Having many things to write unto the elect lady and her children, whom he loved in the truth, the elder, as he wills to call himself, willed not to write with paper and ink, but trusted to come in person and speak face to face, or mouth to mouth, that their joy might be full. Joy there might be, and must be, in receiving a letter from such a penman as this. But for the fulness of joy there must be his personal presence; and in person he trusted to be with his correspondents soon, and to prove what a different meaning "face to face" has from pen, ink, and paper—that in realising the depth of that difference their joy might be full. It has been said that for anything like real friendship there must at one period have been constant and free conversation. "Letters are all very well," and the correspondence of close friends is a comparative good in default of a positive letter; but a shrewd as well as genial authority owns to having not much faith in that friendship which is content with letters, and does not make constant efforts for the more cordial and the closer encounter of hand and eye, of actual face to face. "Without this there may be kind feeling and preference; but warmth is wanting, and warmth is essential to friendship." Immense as is the distance between a letter and an interview, writes Madame d'Arblay to her father from abroad, "where the dearer is unattainable, its *succedaneum* becomes more precious than those who enjoy both can believe, or even conceive. O my dearest father, let no possible conveyance pass without giving me the sight of your hand, if it be but by your signature!" Between the sight of a hand and the warm grasp of one the difference is indeed most real. One of the Crauford worthies describes correspondence as bearing much the same relation to personal intercourse that the *hortus siccus*, or book of dried plants, does to the living and fresh flowers in the lanes and meadows.—*Francis Jacox.*

THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN.

INTRODUCTION.

THERE is little to be added to what has been said concerning the second epistle. There can be no doubt that both were written by the same person; and every argument for the Johannine authorship drawn from the contents of the second epistle can be fully supported by the contents of the third. But no positive knowledge of the person addressed can be obtained.

The contents may be thus summarised: "The writer recounts how some missionaries had been badly received by Diotrephes, who had ambitiously obtained for himself the chief influence in a certain Church, but, notwithstanding, Gaius had been courageous and kind enough to entertain them hospitably. Gaius is exhorted to help them still further. The letter gives us an idea of the high importance of hospitality at the time as a Christian virtue, and brings out the fact that St. John's authority was no less disputed in certain cases than St. Paul's. It is probable that the Church of Diotrephes had not been founded by St. John."

Gaius was an exceedingly common name. A person named Gaius is referred to in Rom. xvi. 23; 1 Cor. i. 14; Acts xix. 29, xx. 4. A Gaius is also mentioned in the *Apos. Constit.*, vii. 40, as bishop of Pergamos.

What can be assured is that, whether St. John was the writer of the epistle or not, the writer occupied a position of authority in the Church of which Gaius was a member; but at the time of writing he was away from the Church, and had received reports which had filled him with anxiety. The letter contains three things, affixed to three names, which may be regarded as *types*.

I. **Encouragement.**—Offered to Gaius. The writer recognises soul-prosperity, and wishes it matched with worldly success and bodily health. And there is a natural and necessary connection between soul and bodily prosperity, which would be much more constantly realised and recognised but for the disturbing influences of what is called "civilisation." The soul-prosperity of Gaius is seen—

1. In his piety—"walkest in the truth." 2. In his hospitality—practical goodness.

II. **Censure.**—Of Diotrephes. Human nature has the same weaknesses in every age. In this man—1. Self-assertion. 2. Masterfulness. 3. Inconsiderateness. Shown in dealing with strangers visiting the Church.

III. **Commendation.**—Of Demetrius. He was possibly the man rejected and unworthily treated by Diotrephes. The man who has won a good name may properly expect to *use* his good name.

The one thing impressed in this brief epistle is the importance of Christian character, and the sadness of falling from its high standard of excellence. It is intimated that Christian character always materially helps in securing kind and gracious relations.

PERSONAL CONFIDENCES AND KINDLY WARNINGS.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1. **The elder.**—It cannot be decided whether this was a recognised official title, or an allusion by St. John to his great age. The fact that St. Peter calls himself "a fellow-presbyter" (1 Pet. v. 1) favours the idea that the title is official; and the Jewish Christian communities were likely to call their officials "elders," after the pattern of the synagogue elders. **Gaius.**—Or Caius. This man cannot be confidently indentified with any person previously mentioned (Acts xix. 29, xx. 4; Rom. xvi. 23; 1 Cor. i. 14); but the Gaius mentioned in Rom. xvi. 23 is commended for the hospitality which St. John also praises in *his* Gaius. **In the truth.**—Not merely, "whom I truly love," but, "whom I love with Christian love." There is love we have for persons for their own sakes, and love we have for them as brethren in Christ Jesus.

Ver. 2. **Above all things.**—Concerning all things. *περὶ πάντων*. *περί* gives the notion, "before, on all sides, at every point." In all respects. **Prosper.**—In circumstances. **In health.**—Of body. St. John desires the "all round" blessing of this good man—God's hand upon him for good, in his soul, his body, and his relations. A model of Christian wishes for friends. **Soul prospereth.**—Notice that of his *spiritual* health St. John was well assured, but concerning his health and business successes he seems to have had no definite information.

Ver. 3. **Truth that is in thee.**—It was not merely that the conduct and relations of Gaius were rightly toned; it was that they were manifestly inspired by Christian principles and Christian feeling. The truth was *in him*, and therefore there could be all these kindly and gracious expressions. There was consistency because there was reality.

Ver. 4. **No greater joy.**—*μειζοτέραν*. A double comparative. Compare the English word *lesser*. It may be used to gain intensity, or it may be a mere irregularity. **Children.**—St. John's affectionate term for the members of the Churches, many of whom regarded him as their spiritual father.

Ver. 5. **Faithfully.**—Not impulsively, not selfishly, but with a due sense of duty and obligation, and with an earnest care to do well. Perhaps the precise meaning is "Christianly," in a manner true to thy Christian profession and character. R.V. "Thou doest a faithful work in whatsoever thou doest." *Westcott:* "Thou makest sure whatsoever thou workest," *i.e.* "Such an act will not be lost, will not fail of its due issue and reward." **To strangers.**—Precisely, "to the brethren, and that strangers." The point is, that Gaius had been specially trustful and kind in dealing with Christian brethren who, in their journeyings, had visited the Church with which he was connected. These brethren were often "strangers," personally unknown; and it was only too easy to be suspicious of their integrity, and so to neglect them. "The duty of entertaining Christians on their travels was of peculiar importance in early times: (1) from the length of time which travelling required; (2) from the poverty of the Christians; (3) from the kind of society they would meet in public inns. The duty is enforced in Rom. xii. 13; 1 Tim. iii. 2; Tit. i. 8; Heb. xiii. 2; 1 Pet. iv. 9" (*Sinclair*).

Ver. 6. **Charity.**—Distinguished from *love* as a feeling or sentiment. Charity is Christian love (love for Christ's sake), finding expression in deeds of kindly service. In this sense of the term it is well to retain the word "charity" used in the A.V. of the New Testament. No intelligent reader confuses "charity" with "almsgiving." **Before the Church.**—That Church with which the apostle John was, at the time, closely associated. It is suggested that certain persons had been sent from St. John's Church on some Christian mission to other Churches. On their journey they had visited the Church of which Gaius was a member. They were strangers, and some regarded them with suspicion, but Gaius had not only trusted them, and given them hospitality, but had interested himself in their mission, and furthered them in their plans. **Bring forward.**—This implies that there was yet some service to the missionaries which Gaius could render.

Ver. 7. **His name's sake.**—The more precise rendering is, "for the sake of *the* name.'

Compare Acts v. 41. **Taking nothing of the Gentiles.**—Not seeking help from them, but fully trusting the Christian love of the Christian brethren.

Ver. 9. **Wrote unto the Church.**—Evidently to introduce the coming missionaries, and to prepare the way for them. Read, "I wrote somewhat," *i.e.* a short letter. It was evidently a brief request that kindness might be shown to the visitors. **Diotrephes.**—The name can be of no Christian significance, for it only means, "love-nourished." He was a prominent member of the Church, and probably a man of wealth and influence. We need not think he was an insincere or bad man. He was undisciplined in character, and his natural dispositions were unlovely. The root of evil was probably jealousy of the confidential relations of Gaius and St. John. That spirit would lead him to oppose whatever Gaius wished. **Pre-eminence.**—Note how opposed to the spirit of Christ, who was among us as "He that serveth," and to the teachings of Christ, "If any among you wishes to be chief, let him be your minister." The desire for pre-eminence in a Christian community is the fruitful occasion of trouble. He who wants pre-eminence is likely to be unscrupulous in his methods of striving for it. **Receiveth us not.**—Will not recognise our authority, or give our wishes due consideration.

Ver. 10. **Prating against us.**—Painful reports of what had been said and done in the Christian assemblies had reached St. John, and the supreme mischief was that a party had been formed which gathered round the masterful Diotrephes. He had evidently acted in a very unreasonable and violent way. He actually went so far as not only to refuse hospitality to the missionaries, but also to eject from the local congregation those who were willing to entertain them.

Ver. 11. **That which is evil.**—Notice the Christian carefulness which avoids saying, "*him* who is evil." Possibly there was some danger of Gaius yielding for the sake of peace. St. John reminds him that if a thing is manifestly wrong from the Christian standpoint, he must stand against it, whatever may be the cost. He must not give way from any good-natured pliability. **Good is of God.**—A familiar Johannine teaching. See 1 John ii. 16, 29, iii. 8, 9, iv. 4, 6, 7. **Not seen God.**—1 John iii. 6.

Ver. 12. **Demetrius.**—Either the principal man of the missionaries, whose genuineness Diotrephes refused to recognise, or the person sent to Gaius with this letter. The former is the better suggestion. It is then a strong assurance of the trustworthiness of Demetrius, so that Gaius might confidently persist in his kindly treatment of him and his fellow-messengers. There is no good reason for identifying the person with the Demetrius of Acts xix. 24. **Of the truth itself.**—Or, "of the spirit of truth." It may, however, mean, "judged by the Christian standard." For a similar double witness, see John xv. 26, 27. **Record.**—Or, "testimony."

Ver. 14. **Our friends.**—Precisely, "the friends."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—4.

A Pastor's Joy in His People.—This finds expression in two very suggestive and striking figures of speech: "Even as thy soul prospereth"; "Walkest in the truth."

I. **Soul-prosperity.**—What he means may be illustrated by enlarging his sentence: "I wish for you that your soul may prosper and be in health, even as I wish that your body may prosper and be in health." We cannot think of God without the mental help derived from the forms of humanity; and we cannot think of the soul save as shaped as a sort of counterpart of the body. And its full health and ideal perfection are conceived by us with the help of bodily conditions. 1. What then are the marks of a prosperous soul? That soul is prosperous in which—(1) The truth dwells richly. (2) The doctrinal and practical parts of religion are well proportioned and united. (3) There is a happy mixture of the retired and the active. (4) There is a good degree of public spirit and largeness of heart. (5) There is no wrong ambition. 2. Why does prosperity of soul render temporal prosperity desirable? (1) Because it makes temporal prosperity safe. (2) Because it secures the welfare of others, and promotes the general good. (*Part from A. Fuller.*)

II. **Walking in the truth.**—This properly includes two things: 1. The knowledge of the outward substantial body of truth—the gospel of the grace of God, and of Jesus as our Saviour. 2. A heartfelt possession and enjoyment of the truth, not merely in the intellect, but also in the heart.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 2. *Soul-prosperity.* — John makes soul-prosperity the standard and rule of prayer for other things. This would be a dreadful rule with regard to many. Such praying, if answered, would ruin them. Yes, if they were to prosper in temporal things *as* they prosper in spiritual, they would become the poorest, meanest wretches on earth, for they are strangers to everything like the "true riches"; and if their bodies were to be as healthful *as* their souls, their dwelling would become an hospital, their bed of ease a bed of languishing: they would be blind, for they have no spiritual understanding; deaf, for they never hear the voice of God; dead, for the Spirit of the living God is not in them. Yet this seems to be the only safe rule; for unless religion keeps pace with our outward prosperity, our safety and welfare will be endangered by it. We are not afraid when we see Christians succeed in life, if at the same time they "grow in grace"; but the peril is, when there is so much *sail* and so little *ballast.*—*W. Jay.*

Ver. 3. *Gaius.*—The sincere and generous host of Demetrius, the quiet but sturdy opponent of the intolerance and tyranny of Diotrephes. Gaius was one who "walked in *truth*," and so walked in it that men "bore witness to his *truth*." The Greek word means "reality." Gaius was a true man, a genuine man, a real man, whose life was all of one piece, whose daily conduct was the practical outcome and inference from the truths he believed. Evidently he cared more for deeds than for words. He would not bring the spirit and methods of the world into the Church. Nor would he, as a true man, yield to that still more subtle and fatal temptation by which those are overcome in whom religion degenerates into mere ecclesiasticism or sectarianism. From all these faults and errors Gaius was free. Of an incorrigible and losing honesty, it was his distinction that he was *in* the truth, and that he was *walking*, *i.e.* growing and advancing, in the truth of Christ; that the truth was making him true —true in thought, in motive, in word, in deed, insomuch that, when the eye saw him, it bore witness to him. The charity of Gaius was as conspicuous as his unworldliness. He not only received the strangers, but continued to receive and serve them, even when Diotrephes forbad him, and had persuaded the Church to excommunicate those who ventured to receive them. He could do no other; for he walked in truth. He believed that all who were in Christ were his brethren, even though they were strangers to him; and he was bound to treat them as his brethren, even though for being true to his convictions he was cut off from the body of Christ. A certain genuineness and wholeness, then, a certain staunchness and loyalty, combined with great breadth and tolerance, seems to have been characteristic of the hospitable and kindly Gaius. He was in the truth. He walked in truth. He could be true to truth, come whence it would. He could be true to men, even when they were reviled and thrust out of the Church. In fine, he was a man who stood on his own feet, used his own eyes, and was faithful to the inspirations of the Divine Comforter and Guide who had taken up His abode with him. This large, steadfast, yet gentle loyalty to truth is as essential to a genuine, a real and strong, Christian character now as it was then. The discipline of life, and the advantages and privileges of the Christian life, have been wasted on us, if, whatever our gifts or our lack of them, whatever our opportunities or our lack of them, we have not built up for ourselves, or are not building up, such a character as this; if, whether we do, or do not, strive and cry, and cause our name to be heard

in the streets, there is no quiet sanctuary within our souls, from which a light is sometimes seen, and prayers and songs are sometimes heard, and a hallowed influence constantly proceeds, to prove, to all who are capable of receiving proof, that Christ has an altar and a throne within us, and is the true Lord and Ruler of our life. If we are really walking in the truth, we *must* in various methods, some of them very quiet and simple, but not therefore the less effective, bear witness to the truth which guides and shapes our ways.—*S. Cox, D.D.*

Ver. 4. *Saving a Prodigal Child: a Tradition concerning St. John.*—Tradition has been more than ordinarily busy in preserving anecdotes of St. John. Eusebius relates a beautiful, and not improbable, story to this effect: John, on a visit to a city in the neighbourhood of Ephesus, commended to the care of the bishop a young man of fine stature, graceful countenance, and ardent mind, as suited to the work of the ministry. The bishop neglected his charge. The young man became idle and dissolute, and was at length prevailed on to join a band of robbers, such as commonly had their holds in the neighbourhood of ancient Greek cities. He soon became their captain, and attained to eminence in crime. Long after, John entered the city again, and inquired for the young man. "He is dead," said the bishop—"dead to God." Having ascertained the particulars, the apostle exclaimed, "I left a fine keeper of a brother's soul"; then, mounting a horse, he rode into the country, and was taken prisoner. He attempted not to flee, but said, "For this purpose I am come; conduct me to your captain." He entered the presence of the armed bandit, who, recognising the apostle, attempted to escape. "Why dost thou fly, my son," said he, "from thy father—thy defenceless, aged father. Fear not; thou still hast hopes of life. I will pray to Christ for thee. I will suffer death for thee. I will give my life for thine. Believe that Christ hath sent me." The man was subdued, fell into the apostle's arms, prayed with many tears, became perfectly reformed, and was restored to the communion of the Church.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 5—14.

Sanctified and Unsanctified Natural Dispositions.—There are three men introduced by name to us in this epistle. They are in many things very unlike each other. They are alike in this—that in each case the new Christian life has come into a natural disposition, proposing to alter, or strengthen, or tone that natural disposition as need may be. To use an illustration: Three very different branches, each with its own capabilities, strength, or weakness, or bias, have been grafted into the same living tree. The life of the tree flows freely into each branch, but it has to deal with, it has to be affected by, the condition and bias of each grafted branch, and the fruitage of each branch is found to differ. The same life in each, differing results according to the peculiarities of each. Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius have the life in Christ, but one of them has a natural disposition which even that new life cannot easily tone aright, or cannot tone save with the help of long years of severest discipline.

I. **Gaius had a naturally hospitable disposition.**—The grace of God could fit well to that—could raise the tone of it, dignify it as the expression of high and holy principles, and sanctify the man through the new forms in which he found exercise for it.

II. **Diotrephes had a naturally masterful disposition.**—He would be nowhere if he could not be first. He allowed no resistance of his will. His spirit has

been at once described and satirised, when it is said of such men, "They would rather reign in hell than serve in heaven." Men with such dispositions *can be Christians*; but in them the Christian spirit and life have a long and fearful struggle ere the self-will is brought into subjection. And they make heaps of misery before the good work is accomplished in them.

III. **Demetrius had a naturally amiable disposition.**—There was no one unusual virtue, as in the case of Gaius, but a generally amiable tone and character. He was a gentleman. And it is in such natures that the new life has the freest, fullest sphere for its highest and noblest work.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 7. *For the Name's Sake.*—In all the older manuscripts the phrase is, "For *the* Name's sake." There is no need to put the personal pronoun, or the proper name. There is but one Name known among men, for the sake of which, and to tell the virtue and power of which, men will leave their homes, and wander up and down among the countries and through the cities, taking cheerfully whatever fortunes may come. The men spoken of were evidently Jewish believers, who went out among the Gentiles to tell the glad news. These men were very thankful for any hospitality they might receive from Christian motives, and the well-beloved Gaius was famous for his kindness to the saints. St. John bids him, and those with him, still welcome the stranger in the Name of the Master whom he serves, and for whose Name's sake alone he came to them.

I. **For the Name's sake is the availing plea in acceptable prayer.**—Prayer is not the rising up of the intellectual soul of man to Divinity. That is merely speculative thought, tinged, it may be, with devoutness, but lacking the simplicity, the earnestness, the energy, of real prayer. Real prayer is prayer in the name of Christ. That means that God has revealed Himself in Christ. The name is the character: the name of God is the character of God as manifested among men, as displayed in human history. To pray in the name of Christ is to recognise God in Him, in His whole personality, in His whole history, in what He has done and suffered on our behalf.

II. **For the Name's sake is also, in a pre-eminent degree, the spring and motive-power of holy obedience.**—This is the meaning of the text in its own connection. These men went forth, these first missionaries, in a spirit of self-consecration that asked no questions, that fixed no limits, that reserved no retreat; they went forth to tell the world the news. And they lived upon the news they told. The gospel was meat and drink to them, and clothing, and house, and home. "Taking nothing of the Gentiles." The gospel would be benefited by their self-denial—that settled the question in a moment. "Nothing, nothing from *you*. If you believe the message, if you feel its constraining force, and yield yourselves to Christ, and live through Him to God, then open your door, and spread your table, and light your lamp of welcome, and we will come in. But so long as you are only listeners—undeclared and undecided—nothing." And this was no transient impulse. The whole secret of the loyalty, endurance, unselfishness, of the Christian witnesses and martyrs, lay in this—"For the Name's sake." What essentially is this Christian service? It means the consecration of the redeemed self in wholeness to the glory of Christ, and to the service of our fellow-men under Him. We say from the heart, "For the Name's sake," and then all is easy. The love of Christ has this perfectly unique peculiarity—that it is the love of God

and the love of man in one; and when, "for the Name's sake," we give ourselves to God, and live to God, then we are swayed by the all-comprehending love. Of what importance, then, must it be to a Christian to be full of love—full of the love of Christ to him, shed abroad by the Holy Ghost—full of quick-answering love to Christ—full of the power of "the Name"!—*A. Raleigh, D.D.*

For the Sake of the Name.—The R.V. gives the true force of these words by omitting the "His," and reading merely, "for the sake of the Name." There is no need to say whose name. There is only one which could evoke the heroism and self-sacrifice of which the apostle is speaking. The expression, however, is a remarkable one. The Name seems almost, as it were, to be personified.

I. **The pre-eminence implied in the Name.**—The name means substantially the same thing as the Person of Jesus. The distinction between "the Name" and "the Person" is simply that the former puts more stress on the qualities and characteristics as known to us. Thus "the Name" means the whole Christ as we know Him, or as we may know Him, from the book, in the dignity of His Messiahship, in the mystery of His Divinity, in the sweetness of His life, in the depth of His words, in the gentleness of His heart, in the patience and propitiation of His sacrifice, in the might of His resurrection, in the glory of His ascension, in the energy of His present life and reigning work for us at the right hand of God. All these, the central facts of the gospel, are gathered together into that expression, *the Name*, which is the summing up in one mighty word, so to speak, which it is not possible for a man to utter except in fragments, of all that Jesus Christ is in Himself, and of all that He is and does for us. It is but a picturesque and condensed way of saying that Jesus Christ, in the depth of His nature and the width of His work, stands alone, and is the single, because the all-sufficient, Object of love, and trust, and obedience. There is no need for a forest of little pillars—as, in some great chapter-house,—one central shaft, graceful as strong, bears the groined roof, and makes all other supports unnecessary and impertinent. There is one Name, and one alone, because in the depths of that wondrous nature, in the circumference of that mighty work, there is all that a human heart, or that all human hearts, can need for peace, for nobleness, for holiness, for the satisfaction of all desires, for the direction of efforts, for the stability of its being. The Name stands alone, and it will be the only Name that, at last, shall blaze upon the page of the world's history when the ages are ended, and the chronicles of earth, with the brief "immortality" which they gave to other names of illustrious men, are mouldered into dust. "The Name is above every name," and will outlast them all, for it is the all-sufficient and encyclopædical embodiment of everything that a single heart or the whole race can require, desire, conceive, or attain. So then, brethren, the uniqueness and solitariness of the Name demand an equal and corresponding exclusiveness of devotion and trust in us. "Hear, O Israel! The Lord thy God is *one* Lord. Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God with *all* thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." And, in like manner, we may argue—There is one Christ, and there is none other but He. Therefore all the current of my being is to set to Him, and on Him alone am I to repose my undivided weight, casting all my cares and putting all my trust only on Him. Lean on none other. You cannot lean too heavily on that strong arm. Love none other except in Him; for His heart is wide enough, and deep enough, for all mankind. Obey none other, for only His voice has the right to command. And lifting up our eyes, let us see "no man any more save Jesus only"—the Name that stands

alone! Involved in this, but worthy of briefly putting separately, is this other thought—that pre-eminent and exclusive mention of the Name carries with it, in fair inference, the declaration of His Divine nature. It seems to me that we have here a clear case in which the Old Testament usage is transferred to Jesus Christ, only, instead of the Name being *Jehovah*, it is *Jesus*. It seems to me impossible that a man saturated as this apostle was with Old Testament teaching, and familiar as he was with the usage which runs through it as to the sanctity of "the Name of the Lord," should have used such language as this of my text unless he had felt, as he has told us himself, that "the Word was God." And the very incidental character of the allusion gives it the more force as a witness to the commonplaceness which the thought of the Divinity of Jesus Christ had assumed to the consciousness of the Christian Church.

II. **The power of the Name to sway the life.**—The preposition seems to me to cover both the ground of, "on account of," or "by reason of," and "on behalf of." Taking the word in the former of these two senses, note how this phrase, "for the sake of the Name," carries with it this principle—that in that Name lie all the forces that are needed for the guidance and the impulses of life. In Him, in the whole fulness of His being, in the wonders of the story of His character and historical manifestation, there lies all guidance for men. He is the pattern of their conduct. He is the companion for us in our sorrow. He is the quickener for us in all our tasks. And to set Him before us as our pattern, and to walk in the paths that He dictates, is to attain to perfection. Whosoever makes "for the sake of the Name" the motto of his life shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. And not only is there guidance, but there is impulse, and that is better than guidance. For what men most of all want is a power that shall help or make them do the things that they see plainly enough to be right. Where is there such a force to quicken, to ennoble, to lead men to higher selves than their dead past selves, as lies in the grand sweep of that historical manifestation which we understand by the Name of Jesus? There is nothing else that will go so deep down into the heart, and unseal the fountains of power and obedience, as that Name. Our whole life ought to be filled with His Name. You can write it anywhere. It does not need a gold plate to carve His Name upon. It does not need to be set in jewels and diamonds. The poorest scrap of brown paper, and the bluntest little bit of pencil, and the shakiest hand, will do to write the name of Christ; and all life, the trivialities as well as the crises, may be flashing and bright with the sacred syllables. Mohammedans decorate their palaces and mosques with no pictures, but with the name of Allah, in gilded arabesques. Everywhere, on walls and roof, and windows and cornices, and pillars and furniture, the name is written. There is no such decoration for a life as that Christ's Name should be stamped thereon.

III. **The service that even we can do to the Name.**—That, as I said, is the direct idea of the apostle here. He is speaking about a very small matter. There were some anonymous Christian people who had gone out on a little missionary tour, and in the course of it, penniless and homeless, they had come to a city the name of which we do not know, and had been taken in and kindly entertained by a Christian brother, whose name has been preserved to us in this one letter. And, says John, these humble men went out "on behalf of the Name"—to do something to further it, to advantage it! Jesus Christ, the bearer of the Name, was in some sense helped and benefited, if I may use the word, by the work of these lowly and unknown brethren. Now there are one or two other instances in the New Testament where this same idea of the

benefit accruing to the Name of Jesus from His servants on earth is stated, and I just point to them in a sentence, in order that you may have all the evidence before you. There is the passage to which I have already referred, recording the disciples' joy that they were "accounted worthy to suffer shame on behalf of the Name." There are the words of Christ Himself in reference to Paul at his conversion, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake." There is the Church's eulogium on Barnabas and Paul, as "men that have hazarded their lives for the Name of our Lord Jesus." There is Paul's declaration that he is "ready, not only to be bound, but to die, on behalf of the Name of the Lord Jesus." And in the introduction of the epistle to the Romans he connects his apostleship with the benefit that thereby accrued to the Name of Christ. If we put all these together, they just come to this—that, wonderful as it is, and unworthy as we are to take that great Name upon our lips, yet, in God's infinite mercy and Christ's fraternal and imperial love, He has appointed that His Name should be furthered by the sufferings, the service, the life, and the death of His followers. "He was extolled with my tongue," says the psalmist, in a rapture of wonder that any words of his could exalt God's Name. So to you Christians is committed the charge of magnifying the Name of Jesus Christ. You can do it by your lives, and you can do it by your words, and you are sent to do both. We can "adorn the doctrine"—paint the lily and gild the refined gold, and make men think more highly of our Lord by our example of faithfulness and obedience. We can do it by our definite proclamation of His Name, which is laid upon us all to do, and for which facilities of varying degrees are granted. The inconsistencies of the professing followers of Christ are the strongest barriers to the world's belief in the glory of His Name. The Church, as it is, is the hindrance rather than the help to the world's becoming a Church. If from us sounded out the Name, and over all that we did it was written blazing, conspicuous, the world would look and listen, and men would believe that there was something in the gospel. If you are a Christian professor, either Christ is glorified or put to shame in you, His saint, and either it is true of you that you do all things in the Name of the Lord Jesus and so glorify His Name, or that through you the Name of Christ is "blasphemed among the nations." Choose which of the two it shall be!—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

Vers. 9, 10. *Diotrephes.*—The vain, irritable, and loquacious Diotrephes, whose religion seems to have been quite compatible with a slippery morality. What exactly it was at which Diotrephes took offence, whether in the letter of St. John or in the conduct of Demetrius, we are not told; but it is not difficult to offend a man who has an undue sense of his own importance, and whose self-love may be set on fire by any match, however innocently it may be struck. The offence was some wound to his love of pre-eminence, his determination to stand first, and to exact a homage he did not deserve. Possibly Gaius had "received" Demetrius without consulting Diotrephes, or even after *he* had declined to receive him. Whatever the prick which his vanity had received, the character of the man comes out in his wholly disproportionate and extravagant resentment of the offence. In his resentment he sets himself against men far wiser and better than himself; he imperils the peace of the Church; he diminishes its numbers and strength. His wounded vanity landed him, as it often does land men, in the most bitter animosity and intolerance. He must have won over a majority of his fellow-members to his side. And he must have taken a by-path to his end. He *may* long have cherished a factious spirit in the inferior members of the Church, the

less wise and less good, by opposing whatever Gaius and his friends proposed, and finding plausible reasons for opposing them. And, indeed, a man of inferior gifts and of a spirit less informed by the grace of Christ, who *will* stand first, will put himself forward and attempt to rule a free Christian congregation, *must* take this course. He must play on the ignorance, and even on the piety, of those who follow him,—must affect a superior wisdom, or a superior orthodoxy, or a superior devotion to the claims of its poorer and less-instructed members; must, in short, wield the common weapons of that loud-mouthed, irrepressible, and unsavoury creature, the religious demagogue. He cannot suffer learning, wisdom, godliness, experience, to exert their natural and beneficent influence, but must at all risks counterwork that influence, and suggest plausible reasons for not yielding to it. How else can he win, and maintain, a pre-eminence he does not deserve, which, in his calmer moments, he may even know that he does not deserve? There is nothing in the epistle to suggest that Diotrephes held unsound doctrinal views, or that he fell into what are called gross and open sins. All that he is blamed for is the conceit and self-assurance which rendered him impatient of rivalry or resistance, and set him on seeking power rather than usefulness. *How* did Diotrephes induce his fellow-members to follow his lead, since they must, most of them at least, have been good men, who were not likely to excommunicate their fellows either for an excess of charity, or for wounding his self-conceit? St. John says, "He receiveth not *us*. . . prating against *us* with wicked [or malicious] words." No doubt he questioned the authority of St. John in an indirect way. He may have pitted Paul against John, contrasting their teachings, and unduly exalting Paul. We are told *two* things about Diotrephes. We are told not only that he loved to have the pre-eminence, but also that he was cursed with a voluble tongue, that he would "still be speaking": for how often does a fluent tongue lead a man whither, in his reasonable moods, he would not go, and betray him into positions which he would not willingly have assumed? And if the itch of speaking is apt to lead on to the prating of idle, and even of malicious, words, the lust of power commonly leads to an abuse of power. No punishment is more unwelcome to such an one than that with which St. John threatened Diotrephes: "I will put him in mind of his words and his works"—bring him to book for them, in his own presence and in that of the Church. Such men dislike nothing so much as being compelled to face their own whispers, and to see how they sound in honest and impartial ears, or even in their own ears, now that their excitement and irritation have subsided. Diotrephes, then, was a man who was not necessarily or wholly bad—a man who may have had many good qualities, and have done some service to the Church; but his good qualities were blended with, and their good effects vitiated by, an exorbitant self-conceit and loquacity. So vain, so bent on influence and supremacy, as to be capable of the most cruel intolerance in asserting his supremacy; so talkative as to be capable of slipping into malicious and wicked words rather than hold his tongue or let the Church defer to other guidance than his own,—he offers a much-needed warning to many a man of "spotless respectability and worrying temper, of pious principles and worldly aims," of good intentions but a too voluble tongue, who, because he thinks more highly of himself than he ought to think, flatters himself that he is serving the Church when he is only pandering to his self-importance and self-conceit, and is cruelly injuring the Church he professes to love. Let, then, your religion show itself in deeds rather than in words, in a life conformed by the grace of Christ to the will of God, not in loud professions and loquacious speeches, nor in an intolerant temper, and your readiness

to sit in judgment on your brethren, and to pass sharp and pungent verdicts upon them.—*S. Cox, D.D.*

Prating for Pre-eminence.—The verb φιλοπρωτεύειν occurs in Polybius in the sense of *to domineer*, and Plutarch is cited for the equivalent phrase πάντα πρωτεύειν βουλόμενος. The race of domineering praters is not likely to die out. In all times it has flourished and in all climes. Many prate themselves into pre-eminence with malicious words or otherwise, by dint of pushing without scruple, of prosing without mercy, of self-assertion and self-glorification, and all for love of having pre-eminence, with the profits, real or reputed, thereunto attached, or thence accruing. Some men, as Emerson says, love only to talk where they are masters; they like to go to school-girls or to boys, or into shops where the sauntering people gladly lend an ear to any one. They go rarely to their equals: "listen badly, or do not listen to the comment or the thought by which the company strive to repay them; rather, as soon as their own speech is done, they take their hats." Swift's readers could supply the name of the person indicated in that paragraph of his essay on conversation, where he professes to know a man of wit who is never easy but where he can be allowed to dictate and preside, who expects neither to be informed nor entertained, but to display his own talents, whose business is to be good company and not good conversation, and who therefore chooses to frequent those only who are content to listen, and profess themselves his admirers—witlings and suckling Templars, who every sentence raise, and wonder with a foolish face of praise. Dr. Moore's analysis of the self-conceit of Zeluco includes this characteristic—that, detesting all whom he suspected of having sufficient penetration to see into his real character, he could support the company of those only upon whose understandings he imagined he imposed by giving them a much better idea of his character than it deserved. "This accounts for his constant preference for ignorant society"—a preference tending to the same result as Gay sets forth in the prelude to one of his fables:—

> "How fond are men of rule and place,
> Who court it from the mean and base!
> These cannot bear an equal nigh,
> But from superior merit fly.
> They love the cellar's vulgar joke,
> And lose their hours in ale and smoke;
> There o'er some petty club preside,
> So poor, so paltry, is their pride;
> Nay, e'en with fools whole nights will sit,
> In hopes to be supreme in wit."

The man of strong intellect and firm will is apt, as Professor Spalding says, to degenerate into dogmatism, and reasons with his fellow-men in the same spirit in which the Jews built the second Temple, where every man worked with one hand and with the other hand held a weapon. What insolent familiar, asks Lamb in his notes on the old Benchers of the Inner Temple, durst have mated Thomas Coventry?—whose person was a quadrate, his step massy and elephantine, his face square as the lion's, his gait peremptory and path-keeping, indivertible from his way as a moving column, the scarecrow of his inferiors, the brow-beater of equals and superiors. But who does not love to rule, be it over a genius or a dolt?—*Francis Jacox.*

Ver. 12. *Demetrius.*—This epistle was probably written from Ephesus, toward the close of St. John's long life and ministry, and addressed to one of the neighbouring Churches of Asia Minor, which St. Paul had founded some thirty or forty years before. Obviously there was a good deal of independence in the Churches when one Church in a province could refuse communion with men who were commended to them by another Church, could excommunicate those who did commune with them, and an unknown Diotrephes could not only set himself, but persuade the majority of his fellow-members to set themselves, against the

request and command of one of the apostles who had seen the Lord, and he the disciple whom Jesus had loved above the rest. But if the Churches had grown in independence, they had not declined in missionary zeal. The Churches under the charge of St. John were sending out evangelists, such as Demetrius, to the Gentiles. The impression which the epistle leaves on our minds is that the members of the primitive and apostolic Church were not, as they have sometimes been drawn, saints who lived together in an unbroken charity and peace, "too good for human nature's daily use," but men and women of like passions with ourselves; with much that was good in them, but also with not a little that came of evil; capable of heroic self-sacrifice, but also capable of sinking into selfish ambitions, and envies, and strifes—of falling, in short, into the very errors and faults of which we find some lingering traits even in the Church life of to-day, when we ought to be so much wiser and better than they. Demetrius and his fellows had been called to the evangelic office, and had devoted themselves to preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. St. John knew them, loved them, approved them, gave them letters of commendation to the Churches of Asia Minor, and, among others, to the Church of which both Gaius and Diotrephes were members. Diotrephes, evidently a man of some mark and gifts, declined to have anything to do with them: perhaps because Demetrius did not come first to him, or did not make much of and defer to him; perhaps because he preferred St. Paul's doctrinal and argumentative method of teaching, and his demand for faith, to St. John's Divine and deep simplicity, and his eternal insistence on charity, or love. In any case he did not like Demetrius, did not take to him; and doubtless he soon found or imagined abundant reasons for his dislike. Having formed and uttered his hasty opinion, Diotrephes was not the man to draw back from it. Nor was he content to keep it to himself, to hold it alone. He must impose it on the Church. When others would have "received" the evangelists, he forbad them. If they paid no heed to his prohibition, he got them "cast out" of the Church—the motto of this lover of pre-eminence being, apparently, "Better to reign in a small Church than to serve in a large one." Undeterred by his influence and threats, the hospitable Gaius had welcomed the repulsed and disheartened evangelists to his home, and furthered them in their good work. Whether he also was excommunicated by Diotrephes, or whether he was too wealthy and powerful a man to be attacked, we are not told. But, at all risks, he discharged his duty, having, I suppose, an affectionate reverence for St. John which made the displeasure of a Diotrephes sit lightly upon him. Demetrius was very grateful to him; and when he returned to Ephesus, reported the fidelity of Gaius both to the apostle, and to the Church of which John was pastor or bishop. And now the apostle sends back Demetrius, and writes to Gaius, commending and encouraging him, and promising him a speedy visit, in the course of which he will depose Diotrephes from his pride of place, make him eat his "wicked words," and restore those whom he had cast out. Demetrius was an *evangelist*, a *travelling* evangelist, or missionary. He had devoted himself to the service of the Gentiles (ver. 7), and he was probably also a prophet. But whatever his gifts, and whether few or many, there can be no doubt of the *self-sacrificing and disinterested spirit* in which he used them. Simply to travel was dangerous in those days, since every stranger was then held to be an enemy. But to go into the schools, market-places, and sanctuaries of strange cities, in order to teach a strange religion, was very like courting death. But Demetrius did not shrink. He would "take nothing of the Gentiles." Like St. Paul, he knew well enough that, if he seemed to make anything by his message, the

sharp, suspicious traders of the Asian harbours and markets would close their minds and hearts, as well as their purses, against him. Hence he would take nothing from them; no, not even if it was offered him, lest he should be placing a stone of stumbling in the way of any whose consciences had been touched. If we ask for the motive which inspired this noble and self-sacrificing devotion to the spiritual welfare of men, we are told that it was simply "for the sake of the Name" that Demetrius devoted himself to the service of the Gentiles. The "way" stood for the "way of Christ," or the Christian way of thought and life. And, in like manner, "the Name" was the Name of the great Saviour of men, and stood for all that was known of Him, all that was summed up in Him. What moved Demetrius and his companions to their great and perilous work was the love they bore to the Name of Jesus Christ their Lord, and the Lord and Saviour of all men. What the "Name" really covers is that Jesus Christ was the Saviour whom God had promised and anointed, and that God was in Him, reconciling the world unto Himself. Demetrius won for himself a threefold testimony: 1. He won the witness of *all*—the witness of all good men, of all who were capable of appreciating goodness. 2. He won the testimony of *the truth itself*. He embodied the truth in deeds of love and self-sacrifice of which he would have been incapable but for the truth which animated and sustained him. The truth itself speaks through such a man, and bears witness to him. 3. St. John adds his own testimony: "*we also* bear witness." How it nerves a man's courage, and sustains his devotion, if some great master, or apostle, openly supports him, saying, "I love him; I trust him: receive *him* as you would receive me"!—*S. Cox, D.D.*

THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF JUDE.

INTRODUCTION.

This writer styles himself "the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James." He was not therefore Jude, the son of James the apostle. It appears most probable that he is to be identified with Jude, the brother of the Lord and of James (Matt. xiii. 55; Mark vi. 3), who was not an apostle, and indeed was converted to faith in Christ after the Lord's resurrection. His brother James was, probably, the first bishop of Jerusalem, and the author of the epistle that bears the name of James.

The exact personality of the author being uncertain, the canonicity of the letter has always been a matter of doubt. A marked peculiarity of the letter is its quotation of things which are not found in the Old Testament Scriptures. The writer even quotes directly from the apocryphal book of Enoch, and possibly also from another apocryphal book entitled "The Assumption of Moses." If the canonical position of Jude's epistle is recognised, it remains disputable whether his authority must be accepted as verifying quotations from books whose canonical value and authority are unrecognised. But that question introduces the larger question of the limitations within which Divine inspiration operated in the Bible-writers. The quotations from apocryphal writings in Jude's epistle present the gravest difficulties, and they even compel a careful and candid consideration of the quotations from canonical Scriptures which are made by all the New Testament writers.

Dean Plumptre skilfully summarises all that can be known concerning this writer. He must have been "born some few years before B.C. 4; and if we are right in assigning his epistle to nearly the same date as those of St. Peter, he must have been not far from seventy at the time of writing it. There is, perhaps, no writer in the New Testament of whose life and character we know so little. We can but picture to ourselves, as in the case of his brother James, the life of the home at Nazareth, the incredulous wonder with which they saw

Him whom they had known for so many years in the daily intercourse of home-life, appear first in the character of a teacher, and then of a prophet, and then of the long-expected Christ. So it was that they sought to stay His work (Matt. xii. 46; Mark iii. 31-35; Luke viii. 19-21), and were yet in the position of those who believed not when they went up to the Feast of Tabernacles six months before the close of our Lord's ministry (John vii. 5). They were, however, converted to a full acceptance of his claims between the Crucifixion and the Ascension—probably, we may believe, by our Lord's appearance to James after the Resurrection (1 Cor. xv. 7), or by their sharing in the manifestation which was made to five hundred brethren at once (1 Cor. xv. 6)."

"Reading between the lines of the epistle, we can trace something of the character of the man. We miss the serene calmness which distinguishes the teaching of his brother, but its absence is adequately explained by the later date of the epistle, by the presence of new dangers, by the burning indignation roused by the sensual impurities of the false teachers with whom he had to do. What strikes us most, in some sense, as an unexpected difficulty, is the reference to narratives and prophecies which we find nowhere in the canonical scriptures of the Old Testament, but which are found in spurious and unauthentic apocrypha. . . . The false teachers against whom he wrote were, we know, characterised largely by their fondness for 'Jewish fables' (Tit. i. 14), and the allusive references to books with which they were familiar were therefore of the nature of an *argumentum ad hominem*. He fought them, as it were, with their own weapons."

Dean Plumptre gives the following admirable analysis of the contents of the epistle: "The writer addresses himself at large to all who were consecrated and called as God's people (vers. 1, 2). He states that he had been moved to write to them, urging them to contend for the faith, by the dangers of the time (ver. 3). Ungodly men are turning the grace of God into lasciviousness (ver. 4). Believers should therefore remember that no privileges, however great, exempt them from the danger of falling, as the Israelities fell after leaving Egypt, as the angels, and the Cities of the Plain, had fallen (vers. 5-7). The sins of the false teachers were like theirs and worse, as sins against nature, sins after the pattern of those of Cain, and Balaam, and Korah (vers. 8-11). They mingled in the Agapæ with impure purposes; all images of natural disorder, rainless clouds, withering trees, wandering stars, were realised in their lives (vers. 12, 13). Truly had Enoch prophesied that the Lord would come to judge such as these, murmurers, self-willed, covetous (vers. 14-16). From that picture of evil the writer turns to warn his readers against another hardly less threatening danger from the mockers of the last days, sensual and schismatic (vers. 17-19). In contrast with both these classes, they were to build themselves up in faith, and prayer, and love (vers. 20, 21). They must not shrink from rebuking those that needed rebuke, but they must deal with each case on its own merits, with greater or less severity (vers. 22, 23). The writer ends with an ascription of praise to God as their protector and preserver from all the dangers that threatened them (vers. 24, 25)."

THE ENEMIES OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1. **The servant.**—Better, "a servant." As he does not call himself an apostle, we cannot, without adequate reason assigned, identify him with the apostle Judas. **Brother of James.**—Which James is uncertain. Probably the James who wrote the epistle. Perhaps he wished, by this indication, to distinguish himself from others, like Judas, not Iscariot (John xiv. 22, Luke vi. 16); the Lebbæus or Thaddeus of Matt. x. 3; Judas, surnamed Barsabas (Acts xv. 22), and others. Perhaps Jude claimed authority as the brother of one so honoured as James the Just. **Sanctified.**—Perhaps "beloved" is the better reading. If "sanctified" is kept, the idea in the word must be "separated"; not "made holy." To Jude the Christian disciples are (1) designated or separated in the Father's love, and (2) preserved until the time when they could be (3) called in Christ Jesus. It was a favourite thought of the early teachers that the disciples were chosen, separated, and preserved by God, before their conscious life of discipleship began, in the personal call of the Lord Jesus.

Ver. 2. **Mercy, peace, love.**—Compare 1 Pet. i. 2; 2 Pet. i. 2. Sometimes "grace" is used for "mercy." All three may be taken as Divine bestowments. Love as the Divine personal affection, finding ever gracious expression. Or the three may be regarded as in logical order; mercy from God to man; hence peace between God and man; hence love of all towards all. **Be multiplied.**—πληθυνθείν, peculiar, in salutation, to Jude and 1 and 2 Peter.

Ver. 3. **Common salvation.**—It does not immediately appear why he uses this epithet "common." He may only mean, "this salvation which is a matter of common interest to us all." The best MSS. read, "of our common salvation"; of those things which pertain to the salvation of us all. It is suggested that Jude may intend to distinguish between the "faith," or "salvation," which is common to all, and the "knowledge" which was claimed by false teachers as belonging only to a few. **Faith once delivered.**—Faith is objective—the substance of truth offered to faith. It is assumed that this is well known, and stands within recognised limitations. It was not then embodied in a creed; and we cannot with certainty declare its contents. The apostle Paul frequently refers to a well-known and clearly-defined setting of the primary Christian verities (2 Tim. i. 13, 14, etc.). **Saints.**—Such they were in their calling; and such they were by their separation through belief of the Christian truth. There is special significance in the term "saints" here, because Jude has in mind those who were disgracing the Christian profession by moral licence. He means to suggest a contrast.

Ver. 4. **Unawares.**—Finding their opportunity in Christian unwatchfulness. Mischievous teachers get into Churches under false pretences. **Of old ordained.**—Reference is to previous prophetic intimations and warnings, and not to Divine decrees. The sentence has been well rendered thus: "who were long ago before marked out as on their way to this condemnation." "Ordained" means "written down," or "written up"; the "metaphor may come from the practice of posting up the names of those who had to appear in court for trial." προγεγραμμένοι εἰς κρίσιν. **Condemnation.**—The denunciation which follows. Their "ungodliness" is seen in the two things which most distressed the later Christian writers: (1) the association of the Christian profession with sensual indulgences; and (2) the teaching of perilous error concerning the person of Jesus Christ. In "Lord God," the name "God" should be omitted. Only one person is meant. "Denying Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord."

Ver. 5. **In remembrance.**—That which we have in mind is often well and wisely brought up forcibly before our minds.

Ver. 6. **Angels, etc.**—There is nothing in the Old Testament to which this can be referred, unless we take "angels" to be a figurative term for the antediluvians. It is most probably a reference to a tradition which is preserved in the book of Enoch, but whether that book was written before or after the epistle of Jude seems to be uncertain. The passages in the book of Enoch, or the traditions which these passages fix, are as follows: Chap. vii. 1, 2—"It happened, after the sons of men had multiplied in those days, that daughters were born to them, elegant and beautiful. And when the *angels, the sons of heaven*, beheld them, they

became enamoured of them, saying to each other, Come, let us select for ourselves wives from the progeny of men, and let us beget children." Chap. xv. 7—"Therefore I made not wives for you [angels] because, being spiritual, your dwelling is in heaven." Chap. xviii. 16—"Therefore was he offended with them [the angels], and bound them, until the period of the consummation of their crimes in the secret year." (Compare chap. xxi. 2, 3—"I beheld . . . a desolate spot, prepared, and terrific. There, too, I beheld seven stars of heaven [angels], bound in it together. These are those of the stars which have transgressed the commandment of the most high God; and are here bound, until the infinite number of the days of their crime be completed." Compare chap. lxxxvii. 2, 3.) **Estate.**—Principality. The term belongs to the Jewish classification of angels, and refers to their power or rule. **Everlasting chains.**—An evident figure of speech. "Everlasting" suggests "firm gripping," "severe" rather than merely "continuous." For other traditions influencing Jude, see *Illustrations.*

Ver. 7. **Giving themselves over.**—ἐκπορνεύσασαι; the ἐκ denotes the intensity of their lust, which would be gratified at all hazards. **Strange flesh.**—Other flesh; *præter naturam;* Rom. i. **Eternal fire.**—As eternal is a spiritual quality, and fire a material substance, the association of the two terms must be figurative, and suggestive of moral truth. **Vengeance.**—Is of course "just punishment," not "unrestrained feeling."

Ver. 8. **Filthy dreamers.**—Omit the adjective. We call similar persons "mystics"; and with such there is always peril of neglecting the moral claims of religion. "Under the plea of spiritual perfection, these men have indulged in carnal pollutions, have sinned against themselves, have held tenets subversive of all civil authority and constituted government, have formed degrading conceptions of heavenly glories, or of glorified beings, as saints and angels, reducing the hope of the Church to the sensual delights of a Mahometan paradise."

Ver. 9. **Michael the archangel.**—For the legends concerning him, see *Illustrations.* See Zech. iii. 2; Dan. x. 21, xii. 1; Rev. xii. 7. There can be no doubt that an unhistorical incident is here cited as a warning; and our theories of inspiration must be such as can admit this fact.

Ver. 10.—"What they do not know, and cannot know, they abuse by gross irreverence. What they know, and cannot help knowing, they abuse by gross licentiousness."

Ver. 11.—Three examples of similar wickedness. The stories of Cain, Balaam, and Korah. The root-evil in each case is covetousness. There were singular Rabbinic legends associated with Cain. Balaam's advice to seduce Israel to moral evil is in mind (2 Pet. ii. 15). "A strange legend placed the souls of Korah and his company in Gehenna, but represented them as not being tormented there."

Ver. 12. **Spots.**—Lit. σπιλάδες, rocks; Vulg. *maculæ* (compare 2 Pet. ii. 13). "Rocks in your love-feast, causing stumbling and shipwreck." **Feeding themselves.**—Seeking their own interests; getting their satisfaction out of leading you astray, forwarding their own purposes. **Clouds . . . trees.**—Figures of useless things, that may be noisy and may make a show, but prove wholly mischievous (compare 2 Pet. ii.). **Twice dead.**—When it fails to yield good fruit, and when it wholly loses vital sap.

Ver. 13. **Raging waves.**—With evident allusion to unrestrainedness of sensual passions. **Wandering stars.**—Figure from the shooting stars, or the comets. Suggestive of the short-lived fame and baleful influence of these false teachers. "They too were drifting away into the eternal darkness."

Ver. 14. **Enoch also.**—Here is almost a verbal quotation from the apocryphal book of Enoch, or from the tradition embodied in that book. See *Illustrations.* **Seventh from Adam.**—Some symbolical importance attached to this numbering which cannot now be recovered.

Ver. 15. **Execute judgment.**—To exercise universally judicial administration. This must not be taken as a quotation from inspired Scriptures.

Ver. 16. **Persons in admiration.**—Or loudly praising persons for the sake of what they can get out of them.

Ver. 18. **Ungodly lusts.**—Lit. "after the lusts of their own impieties."

Ver. 19. **Separate themselves.**—Carrying with them a certain following, and so making schisms and sects. **Sensual.**—Better "sensuous." **The Spirit.**—Who, if He dwells in us, surely controls the natural ambitions and passions. The word for "Spirit" is without the article in the Greek, so it may mean simply "unspiritual."

Ver. 20.—This gives positive teaching. It answers the question, What can sincere and earnest believers do to guard themselves from the insidious influence of evil men, and imperilling surroundings and influences? The answer in the general is thus given—Faith is strengthened and preserved by growth in the Christian life, prayer of the meditative and fervent type, cherishing the sense of the personal divine love, and keeping up hope of the fulfilment of the promise in Christ Jesus. **Most holy faith.**—This can only mean, a recognised and accepted set of first principles and truths, on which the apostolic stamp rested. Most holy faith as opposed to the most unholy quicksands of the doctrines condemned in this epistle. By building up is more especially meant, "strengthening the foundations."

Praying in the Holy Ghost.—An expression not found elsewhere. "What is meant is the ecstatic outpouring of prayer in which the words of the worshipper seem to come as from the Spirit who 'helpeth our infirmities.'"

Ver. 21. **Love of God.**—In the sense of His love to us. See John xv. 9. **Looking for.**—With a special anticipation of your Lord's coming.

Ver. 22. **Making a difference.**—The A.V. appears to have been taken from the later MSS. The R.V. gives the reading which has earlier and better authority, but its English is somewhat involved: "And on some have mercy, who are in doubt [margin 'while they dispute with you']; and some save, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." The subject is the discrimination with which it was necessary to treat Christians who were not well established in the faith. There is a wise blending of tenderness and severity. **Hating the garment.**—That is, avoiding all familiarity with them, as they would avoid touching the garment infected from the flesh of one who had died of pestilence.

Ver. 24. **Able to keep you.**—Whatever may be said about your self-efforts, the supreme truth is that God can keep, and your supreme hope should rest on the assurance that He is keeping. **Falling.**—Better stumbling, or the mistakes that may lead to a fall. **Of His glory.**—That associated with His second coming.

Ver. 25. **Only wise God.**—Better "to the wise God alone." R.V. "to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord." **Both now and ever.**—R.V. "before all time, and now, and for evermore." "Before all time" is exactly "before the whole æon," "for ever" is literally "unto all the ages or æons."

The Angels and their First Estate.

Dean Plumptre's Note on Ver. 6.—St. Jude's language, like that of St. Peter, follows the traditions of the book of Enoch, which speaks of fallen angels as kept in their prison-house until the day of judgment; and also those which are represented in the *Midrasch Ruth* in the *Book of Zohar*—"After that the sons of God had begotten sons, God took them and brought them to the mount of darkness, and bound them in chains of darkness which reach to the middle of the great abyss." A fuller form of the Rabbinic legend relates that the angels Asa and Asael charged God with folly in having created man who so soon provoked Him, and that He answered that if they had been on earth they would have sinned as man had done. "And thereupon He allowed them to descend to earth, and they sinned with the daughters of men. And when they would have returned to heaven they could not, for they were banished from their former habitation, and brought into the dark mountains of the earth." The resemblance between this tradition and that of the Zoroastrian legend of the fall of Ahriman and his angels, and again of the punishment of the Titans by Zeus in the mythology of Hesiod, shows the widespread currency of the belief referred to.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1, 2.

True Believers.—The salutation slightly differs from those of the epistles generally, but in the main both the disposition and the expressions of the writer are of the usual apostolic form. Compare 1 Cor. i. 2, ἡγιασμένοις ἐν Χριστῷ. Manuscripts A, B, seven cursives, Vulgate, Syriac, Coptic, and some others have ἠγαπημένοις, which also both Lachman and Tischendorf have adopted. Having weighed all the arguments, we do not see a sufficient reason for the alteration. Besides, the appellation ἡγιασμένοι is more distinguishing when the Church is regarded in relation to the world. Jude was writing to the dispersed Christian Jews, who kept themselves separate from the world. With this the meaning of τετηρημένοις agrees. It was difficult for them, being few and poor, to preserve that degree of independent life which their profession of Christ demanded; by the power and grace of God they were enabled to do so. In the Syriac version we have the addition, "To the Gentiles who are called, beloved of God the Father," etc. Evidently this cannot be a part of the text, although a very good exposition of it, inasmuch as possibly this apostle intended the epistle for the edification of the Gentile converts as well as the Jewish Christians. The terms ἔλεος, εἰρήνη, and ἀγάπη are as comprehensive as any, if not more so, which the other apostles have used. In both his epistles St. Peter only uses

grace and *peace*. This also proves that St. Jude was not a slavish copyist or imitator of St. Peter. A very profitable introduction might be worked out from the thought that the apostles regarded their own cordial feelings towards, and their fervent prayers for, those to whom they wrote, and whom they hoped to influence by their writings, of primary importance. To the Christian teacher it is of the utmost importance to stand in the best possible relations to those whom he intends to benefit.

I. **Characteristics of the true believers.**—There are three, and they include all which pertain to godliness. 1. *A Divine act in the soul.* The idea of consecration is here intended. But we cannot be acceptable to God without the impartation of purity. When we are set apart for the service and glory of Christ, it must be after the washing of regeneration. Sanctification implies the twofold operation of partaking of the Divine nature and being set apart for the Master's use. 2. *Divine guardianship over the soul.* The idea of preservation here is limited to the *faith* of believers. They were preserved in the holy state which we have before mentioned. We are preserved in the matter of possession —what God has given us, and in the matter of condition—what God has made us. 3. *Divine leadership before the soul.* This is the call to service, activity, and suffering. Whatever we have to do or suffer, there is a voice which calls us thereto.

II. **The blessings of true believers.**—The apostolic prayer is that the threefold condition before described might be sustained by a triple stream of goodness. 1. *God's mercy to maintain their purity.* The very idea of weakness and imperfection is here implied. By the constant supply of grace the saints are kept from falling. 2. *God's peace to maintain their preservation.* Commotion, strife, perturbation of soul invariably lead to loss and disaster. The godly are safe in tumults because the peace of God rules in their heart. 3. *God's love to inspire their life.* To work and die for the Saviour, there is only one incentive—the love of Jesus in the breast. There are other considerations, but this is the mainspring.—*W. P.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 3, 4.

Ver. 3. *The Common Salvation.*—It appears that the mind of the apostle was moved, in the first place, to write concerning salvation generally; but on reflection he was constrained to write on one particular aspect, bearing on the temper of the times. The brevity of the epistle testifies that only one special aspect of religion is set forth. It was in view of the general defection among Christians, then so prevalent, he was earnestly moved to write. The case was urgent, as we learn from *ἀνάγκην ἔσχον*, arising from the necessity of contending earnestly for the faith—*ἐπαγωνίζεσθαι*. The description given in the epistle of the declension of some, and the false teaching of others, fully sets forth the earnest hope the apostle felt, that a few lines from him might serve the good purpose of conserving the true faith.

I. **A designation of the gospel.**—"Common salvation." The gospel had an interest for all. Its integrity was a matter which affected all. Nothing could be of more importance than the general concern which all ought to feel in the matter of the purity of the teaching which was intended to set it forth. 1. *Salvation is the great need of all.* It supplies a universal want. It reveals clearly the great subjects which have agitated human thought in every age—God, the soul, moral accountability, and futurity. It also leads mankind to the fountain of blessing—God in Christ Jesus. If life is to answer any special end, and if the soul of man is to attain to any particular satisfaction and

happiness, the gospel is as great a necessity to the mind as air is to the body. 2. *Salvation is a provision for all.* It touches the case of every one. There had been a Jewish exclusiveness even on the part of the apostles; but they were taught to "call no man common or unclean," and that "God is no respecter of persons." The gospel is free to all, whether Jew or Gentile, Barbarian, Scythian, bond, or free. The gospel, like the sun, is God's great blessing to all men of every clime and time. Jesus is the "Son of man," to designate the universality of His mission. He is come to seek and to save the race of man.

II. **The sacred trust.**—"Once for all delivered unto the saints." The gospel is in the custody of the Church. 1. *The integrity of its doctrines.* Those to whom the Spirit has revealed the truth alone can transmit it to posterity. If *inspiration* has ceased, *illumination* continues. The gospel as a revelation from God is also taught by Him. 2. *The purity of its ordinances.* Truth must have forms as channels of transmission. Sacraments and spiritual exercises are essential to the spread of the gospel and the growth of piety. However free Christianity may be in its spirit, it prescribes forms and rites for the welfare of the Church. 3. *The consistency of its professors.* To walk in the light is the duty of every believer. Christ has ordained that infractions of the laws of His kingdom should receive attention and be visited with discipline. The fruitless and rotten branches must be taken away. The Church has authority to deal with matters of internal order, and also the conduct of its members in the world. The affairs of the kingdom of Christ are now administered by the Church, until He comes.

III. **Special duty enjoined.**—"Contend earnestly for the faith." The Church is often thrown into times of particular difficulty, when its efforts are needed to defend its position in the world. The apostolic Church was early called upon to defend its doctrines and practices against false teachers. This is done: 1. *By unswerving fidelity to truth.* To hold fast that which we have is a duty we owe, not only to ourselves, but to the Church and the world. 2. *By a bold confession before men of that which God has done for our soul.* Men will be convinced of the efficacy of the means when they see the cure. 3. *By being ready to give an intelligent reason for the hope which is in us.* The defence of the faith on the ground of truth and justice is a matter that can be accomplished.

Ver. 4. *The Denial of the Divinity of Christ.*—The reason is here stated why the apostle chose a particular line to write to the scattered Christians. The case was urgent, because the opposition came not from men who had openly denied the truths of the gospel, but from those who had privily crept into the Church, and were, in name, members of it. The danger was not from without this time, but from within. The use of the three verbs παρεισάγω (2 Pet. ii. 1), παρεισέρχομαι (Gal. ii. 4), and παρεισδύω in the text, plainly shows a systematic conspiracy to subvert the truth. The bold opposition of persecution having failed, the evil one covertly introduced into the Church false teachers. The adroit use of προγράφω, which follows, indicates the impossibility of hiding the evil designs of these false prophets. St. Jude doubtless refers to the second epistle of Peter, and also to the warnings contained in the writings of St. Paul. The figure is taken from the practice of posting up the names of those who were cited to trial, with a description of their crimes. Every corrupter of the doctrines, and every disturber of the peace of the Church, is a marked man. On the notice-board of justice is written, "Wanted," etc. The κρῖμα is fully described in the following verses. The force of μετατίθημι, which means to alter a thing from its original use, is brought out in the contrast between the *grace* of God and *lasciviousness* —the greatest abuse of the greatest favour. In the same way we get the full meaning of ἀρνούμενοι from μόνον δεσπότην καὶ Κύριον ἡμῶν. It was not a denying

of the truths of the gospel in general, but the *central* truth—the Divinity and the Divine mission of Christ.

I. **A great crime.**—Never was there a time in the history of the Church when this crime should be guarded against more than at present. The days of intolerance are over, and the danger now is of relaxing all obligations as to the truth, and holding that every man is at liberty to believe and teach whatsoever he pleases. The sacred trust committed to the care of the Church is the "faith once delivered to the saints." Why should men want to change the truth of the living God? Look into the text, and you have the answer. 1. Because the fear of God is not in their soul—"ungodly men." When the helm is broken, the vessel will drift in every direction. Reverence for God is the first essential of faith in revelation. 2. Because to human appearance sin appears less hideous when committed in the name of religion—"turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness." This meant the abuse of that liberty which the gospel confers, and the committal of sin that grace might abound. 3. Because the authority of "our only Master and Lord" is against the licence they would afford the flesh. Take Christ out of the gospel, and any use might be made of it; but give Him His place in the sphere of Divine truth, and the force against sin is irresistible.

II. **An awful doom.**—St. John in the Apocalypse sounds the warning in strong accents: "If any man shall add unto them," etc. (chap. xxi. 18, 19). A few considerations will show that the punishment of those who pervert the truth, and teach so unto others, must be very severe. 1. It is a defiance of Divine authority. God is contradicted. When this is done, moral government is at stake. 2. It is the greatest wrong that can be done to others. If you do not know the way, say so; but to know the way and direct the man to go in the contrary direction is to cause him harm. To tell people that they are on the road to heaven, when it is known that they are going to hell, must be punished. 3. It is an offence against the love of God, who sent His only Son to make us good, and lead us to virtue.—*W. P.*

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 3. *Doctrinal Contention.*—As in war they will clear away the houses and the flower-gardens that have been allowed to come and cluster about the walls and fill up the moat, yet the walls will stand, so in all the conflicts that befall Christ's Church and God's truth, the calming thought ought to be ours, that if anything perishes it is a sign that it is not His, but man's excrescence on His building. Whatever is His will stand for ever.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

Books of the Olden Time.—Who knows anything about the world's wonders of books that, a hundred years ago, made good men's hearts tremble for the ark of God? You may find them in dusty rows on the top shelves of great libraries. But if their names had not occurred in the pages of Christian apologists, flies in amber, nobody in this generation would ever have heard of them.—*Ibid.*

Influence of Strong Assertion.—The consciousness that Christian truth is denied makes some of you falter in its profession, and fancy that it is less certain simply because it is gainsaid. The mist wraps you in its folds, and it is difficult to keep warm in it, or to believe that love and sunshine are above it all the same. "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."—*Ibid.*

Contending for the Faith.—What do we observe as a fact in Christian Church history? This. Christian doctrine is evidently a great whole

made up of many parts. What we seek to find is the harmonious fitting of the several parts, each being held in its proper proportions. But the Christian faith is subject to attacks on its several positions. The attacks have their special characteristics in each age. They should be met by the whole united force of the Church; the common foe met by a common resistance. There is, however, another process going on continually, as Christ's truth is committed to the charge of weak men. Aspects of truth are in constant danger of being pushed to extremes; and important sides and aspects of truth are in constant peril of being neglected and dropped out of sight. And in this way the proportions of truth, the harmonious whole of truth, may be lost. So there is a continual, and ever-repeated call for the activity of those who will reaffirm the truth that is slipping from view, or qualify the truth that is getting exaggerated settings. That may be the good side of what may be misapprehended, and called heresy and schism. It may be questioned in what sense the whole Christian faith was "once for all delivered to the saints." All revelations are wholes for the age to which they come; but they are not necessarily wholes to the after-ages of intellectual and moral advancement. The Mosaic revelation was a whole; but in prophetic times its deeper moral features came to view, and the Christian ages have perfected it, fulfilled it, fully realised it. It is a whole now which the Jews of Moses' time could not by any possibility recognise. Perhaps we may affirm that finality can belong to nothing that bears relation to finite, but ever-unfolding man; and so we can never really look for more than a faith adequate to an age. If your mother's name were defiled, would not your heart bound to her defence? When a prince is a dethroned exile, his throne is fixed deeper in the hearts of his adherents, "though his back be at the wall," and common souls become heroes because their devotion has been heightened to sublimity of self-sacrifice by a nation's rebellion. And when so many voices are proclaiming that God has never spoken to men, that our thoughts of His book are dreams, and its long empire over men's spirits a waning tyranny, does cool indifference become us? will not fervour be sobriety, and the glowing emotion of our whole nature our reasonable service?—*Ibid.*

Right Dealing with Unbelief.—You may hammer ice on an anvil or bray it in a mortar. What then? It is pounded ice still, except for the little portion melted by heat of percussion, and it will soon all congeal again. Melt it in the sun, and it flows down in sweet water, which mirrors that light which loosed its bonds of cold. So hammer away at unbelief with your logical sledge-hammers, and you will change its shape perhaps, but it is none the less unbelief because you have ground it to powder. It is a mightier agent that must melt it—the fire of God's love, brought close by a will ablaze with the sacred glow.—*Ibid.*

Defenders of the Faith.—This exhortation applies to our circumstances in this period of unsettledness in religious beliefs. It is claimed that the old "faith" has served its day, and some new faith must take its place. Our opinion is that instead of finding a new faith, we are on our way to a better understanding of the old one. We are concerned about the *essential truths* of Christianity, and willingly renounce the accretions and interpretations by which those truths have been overlaid and obscured. The indications of our modern unrest point to a change for the better.

I. **What are we to understand by the faith which was once delivered to the saints?**—It is defined as "the common salvation." Not the *doctrine* of salvation, but the *salvation itself*; it is not a *theory*, but an *experience*. Faith is the means, salvation is the

end. "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. i. 9). It was common to all the apostles. They might have particular methods, but they certainly had a general result in view. Salvation was the aim in their teaching. They became all things to all men, that by all means they might save some. This salvation is common to all men, and not a matter pertaining to a particular class. It is available for Jew and Gentile. It is for every one that believeth. The essential truths of Christianity, as contained in the New Testament, constitute the faith once delivered to the saints. 1. *The faith is Divine in its origin.* It is not a production of human philosophy, but the substance of a Divine revelation. The necessity for a Divine revelation appears in the fact that human opinions are so varied and contradictory. When my heart is burdened with the consciousness of guilt, and my soul cries out in its agony, "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" I must have a Divine answer. I need to know God's thought and purpose concerning a penitent soul. The gospel is the Divine answer to human need. 2. *The faith is adapted to man's moral needs.* Three truths force themselves upon our notice when we study man in his moral relations: (1) The sense of guilt and moral weakness; (2) the liability to temptation and trouble; (3) the certainty of death and a future state. These exist in all men everywhere. These are the bases of moral needs, and to these needs the gospel responds. The faith responds to the sense of guilt and moral weakness. The fact and experience of sin are common to all men. In every land men are wrestling with the great problem, "What shall we do to be saved?" The gospel is the specific. "It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." This "common salvation" includes two things—*deliverance* and *safety*. It delivers from impending danger by a perfect pardon. It fortifies and strengthens the soul against the temptations of all evil agencies, so that it is enabled to stand in the glorious liberty of the gospel. The faith responds to the liability to temptation and trouble. All, irrespective of position or rank, are exposed to them. The only remedy philosophy offers is *stoicism*. The gospel discovers One who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. "Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Apart from this living Christ, one of the deepest needs of human nature is left unsatisfied. The certainty of death is also answered by this faith. Death and the problem of the future hang like a heavy pall over all heathendom. The religious and philosophical systems of paganism throw no light upon the darkness of the grave. But the gospel of Christ tells of Him who died and rose again as the firstfruits of those who slept, who has abolished death, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. It inspires men with hope of immortality. It alleviates human bereavement and gilds the future with radiant hope. Blessed gospel! It meets the deepest needs of the human soul. 3. *The faith is complete in its contents* "once delivered"—*i.e.* complete. To it nothing can be added. New light, hidden riches, sweetest harmonies, may be found in it. Astronomy may discover worlds of light in the heavens, but it does not add to the universe. Every star was there before astronomers lifted their telescopes skyward. Astronomy may enlarge our knowledge of the heavens, and thrill us with new views of heavenly beauty, but it cannot create a new star. Music cannot add a new tone to the scale. The octave is the final measure of possible tones. Gifted musicians may combine the tones in new relations, and thus give the world sweeter song and more thrilling melody; but in all the witchery

of music they will never reach beyond the octave of tones. So with the faith. Theology cannot add to it. The Bible will gain in interpretation, but no new principles can be added to its contents. The foundation of our faith is laid in final power away from frost and wave and storm.

II. **To whom was the faith delivered?**—"To the saints." The term refers to *character*, not to official position. 1. *Saints are the depositaries of the faith.* Not councils, priests, or popes, but holy men are the trustees of this precious gift. The power and the safety of the faith are not in organisation, or popular favour, or political power, desirable as these may be, but primarily in the character of individual Christians. 2. *Saints are the disseminators of the faith.* Dissemination is the purpose for which the deposit has been made. Saints hold it in trust for the use and benefit of mankind. Truth must be incarnated before it can become an available factor in the world's evangelisation. God incarnates the gospel in His saints. *This incarnation is the secret of successful evangelism.* The old prophets were mighty because their hearts were burdened with the "word of the Lord." God put His great truths in their hearts, and they were transfigured by the glory of inward truth, and flamed and burned among men. The apostles were resistless evangelists because their souls were thrilled and dominated by the great revelations of Christ, and they could not but speak the things commanded them. The disciples, scattered by persecution, went everywhere. In all their flight they were flaming evangelists. So grew the word of the Lord mightily and prevailed.

III. **What is our duty in reference to the faith?**—"Contend earnestly," etc. 1. *We must hold to it experimentally and consistently.* Not to the theory, but to the practice; not to doctrine merely, but to salvation as a blessed reality. The faith needs not swords to fight for it, but saints to live it. A holy life is the noblest defence of the gospel. 2. *We must hold it with courage and resolution.* The faith has had to contend for recognition in the world. In the beginning the Jew denied it, the Greek ridiculed it, and the Roman denounced it; but the saints contended for it in spite of all. So now it comes into conflict with the prejudices, selfish interests, and wrath of men. It requires brave, true men to stand by it. The age of chivalry is not yet past. Valiant knights of the Order of the Cross are needed now in defence of the old faith. 3. *We must contend for it with simplicity and sincerity.* "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal," etc. Not the weapons of the flesh, not the mere external aids that men are wont to use, not eloquence, learning, wealth, or beauty—these, though highly desirable, are not essential. Simple, sincere Christian lives are the irresistible argument for the faith. I do not undervalue apologetics. Its function is to defend the Bible and set forth the evidences of the Divine authority of the Scriptures. All honour to our "great apologists" for their literary work in defence of our precious faith; but I do insist that an earnest Christian, sincere in heart, true in conduct, pure in speech, and gentle in spirit, is the one unanswerable argument for Christianity. He is "the people's Bible," needing neither commentary nor apology. We are to be "defenders of the faith." Paul's saying ought to be the conviction of our heart: "I am set for the defence of the gospel" (Phil. i. 17).—*W. Hansom, B.D., LL.D.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 5, 6.

Privileges are always Conditional.—St. Jude is concerned for the maintenance of the Christian life in those to whom he writes. They had been highly exalted in being raised to a spiritual life. Their privilege is intimated in the style of

his address to them, in ver. 1. But their fall from privilege was possible; continuance of privilege depended on continuance of faith, and on persistent effort to meet the obligations of privilege. Yet they were in a very perilous way exposed to temptation. It took form as the attractive teachings of men who claimed for them a liberty which was only rightly called "licence," and who shook their confidence in the primary Christian truths which they had received from the apostles. The one thing that filled St. Jude with fear was, that they might presume upon their Christian standing and privilege and think themselves secure. There is no more perilous condition in which any man can be placed than that of self-security. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." St. Jude therefore brings some striking and impressive illustrations of the truth that privileges never have been held, and never can be held, apart from conditions. No created being ever yet had absolute possession of any privilege. It can be lost; it can only too easily be lost. In the paragraph before us the illustrations are taken from two sources—history and tradition.

I. **The illustration from history.**—The salvation of Israel from Egypt was a remarkable sign of Divine favour and interest which lifted the nation of Israel into a high place of dignity and privilege. But that privilege did not keep the rebellious members of that community from suffering the just judgment of God. Their privilege provided no security against their suffering the proper consequences of distrust and disobedience. Even when He had saved them, in such a glorious and gracious way, the "Lord afterward destroyed them that believed [trusted] not." "St. Jude's main object is to warn his readers against that party in the Christian community who, by its abuse of Christian liberty, transformed the gospel of purity into a gospel of wantonness, and to give them a safeguard against such. And the safeguard is this: to hold fast the faith once delivered to them, and to remember the consequences of being unbelieving. For this purpose, no warning could be more apposite than the fate of Jude's own nation in the wilderness" (*Plummer*).

II. **The illustration from tradition.**—It is quite certain that St. Jude did not get the illustration of the fallen angels from any Scriptures that have come down to our time, or of which we have any intimation. St. Peter indeed refers to the matter (2 Pet. ii. 4), but he plainly draws his illustration from the same source as St. Jude. A little thought brings home to us the conviction that it is a matter concerning which men may speculate and imagine much, but can *know* nothing. The nature, estate, possibilities of angels have not been made the subjects of Divine revelation, and we must not attempt to be wise above what is written. Admitting, however, that St. Peter and St. Jude referred to a very familiar tradition of their day, it is important for us to see that their use of it in a way of *illustration* does not guarantee the historical truth of it. Such as it is, and whatever it is, it can be used to illustrate and enforce truths and principles. These angels were thought of as highly exalted in privilege. But they had no absolute security of the privilege. They went wrong when they presumed on their privilege, and failed to meet the conditions of dependence and obedience on which the retention of privilege depended. In a similar way a modern minister may illustrate, and press home some truth, by the stories in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, and his using them in no sense implies his belief in their historic verity. The two illustrations effectively enforce the truth, which is true in every age, that "patient continuance in well-doing" alone can guarantee the retention of Christian privilege.

Vers. 7-11. *Denunciation of Moral Mischief-makers.*—The reference to Sodom and Gomorrah is suggested by the terrible doom of the fallen angels. The connection of thought seems to be this—Those angels fell through sensual self-

indulgence, and their miserable condition is appalling; Sodom and Gomorrah fell through sensual self-indulgence, and the present condition of the Sodomite sinners is appalling. And these false and mischievous teachers are tempting you to just that sensual self-indulgence which must as certainly bring a like appalling ruin round to you. Writing thus, St. Jude rouses himself into a very height of moral indignation which makes him pour forth burning words of denunciation. The danger for Christians lay in the attractiveness, personal fascination, of these mischief-makers, and in the subtlety with which they disguised the real purpose they had in view. To St. Jude they were maskers, "wolves in sheep's clothing," and with a rough hand he pulls the sheepskins off, and shows us plainly enough the gaunt and hungry wolves within. He bids us look at them as thus fully exposed, and see three things—they are irreverent, sensual, covetous.

I. **The moral mischief-makers were irreverent.**—It may be that it was characteristic of these teachers that they tried to undermine the authority of the apostles. We know how St. Paul had to vindicate his claims against them. But it is always a sign of the self-willed teacher, and always a cause for the gravest suspicion, that the tone of a man's ministry is irreverent, either in regard to God or to His servants. The good, sincere man is not irreverent, and cannot possibly be. The self-contained man is almost sure to reveal himself by the tone in which he speaks of *dignities*. By *this* fruit you may always *know* him. They can be no true leaders of men who themselves cannot obey, who "despise dominion." (The illustration from Michael is treated in a *Suggestive Note*.)

II. **The moral mischief-makers were sensual.**—The character of the teaching could be judged by the character of the teachers. Our Lord taught the same truth in the Sermon on the Mount. St. Jude says, "See how these teachers of liberty, which is licence, themselves act in relation to their sensual, animal natures." The revelation is an awful one; it reminds of Sodom and its shameful sins. "What they understand naturally, like the creatures without reason, in these things they are destroyed." The A.V. rendering is altogether more vigorous than the R.V., "What they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves." The teachers of the pure Christianity must themselves be pure. We have a perfect right to refuse any man's teachings, when he does not match his teaching with his life. Sensual restraint is required by Christianity; sensual licence is the teaching of antichrist. And this truth is as true of the refined sensualities of civilisation as of the coarser and more animal forms that are characteristic of earlier times. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord."

III. **The moral mischief-makers were covetous.**—This almost necessarily follows from their self-centredness and self-sufficiency. Covetousness is getting for self, without consideration for the claims of others. The true teacher gets for those whom he teaches; the false teacher gets for himself. The three illustrations taken from Old Testament Scriptures impress this self-centredness which is sure to make a man covetous and grasping. Cain thought what he could get; Balaam considered what would *pay*; and Core [Korah] aimed to secure personal credit. We are right in testing all would-be teachers by the spirit which they show in doing their work. The Lord "pleased not Himself." The apostle said, "We seek not *yours*, but *you*." No man can ever do the work of Christ if he is possessed and ruled by a passion for *serving himself*.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 8. *The Course of Sin.*—After citing the above examples of impenitence and punishment, the apostle returns to the τινες ἄνθρωποι of ver. 4, and proceeds to show an exact parallel between them and both the fallen angels and the inhabitants of the Cities of the Plain. To distinguish them, however, a term is applied—ἐνυπνιαζόμενοι, the exact application of which is open to a diversity of opinions. Beza, Grotius, and a host of other expositors take the word in a figurative sense, meaning idle and delusive fancies, in the same sense as Joseph was called the *dreamer* by his brethren. Some such idea is attached to the word in the A.V., where it is qualified by the word "filthy." There is nothing in the original to indicate this except the context. In Acts ii. 17, we have καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ὑμῶν ἐνύπνια ἐνυπνιασθήσονται—"and your elders shall dream dreams." When Jude calls the false teachers *dreamers*, it appears to us that the Gnostics of his day claimed supernatural illumination. The apostles claimed inspiration, and to meet this they assumed the same Divine authority. The R.V. has, "in their dreamings"; but this appears a forced translation of the participle, considering the case and the gender. Once more the apostle refers to their *sodomy*—σάρκα μὲν μιαίνουσι, which is a strong expression to denote an unnatural method of gratifying lust. By κυριότητα we understand apostolic authority; and by δόξας the *apostles* themselves. Translating according to our view—'In like manner indeed also these, the dreamers, pollute the flesh, set at nought authority, and blaspheme the excellent.' The course of sin is much the same in all places and at all times. Its marks are the same on the spirit of the fallen angels, the inhabitants of Sodom, and the false teachers in Asia Minor. The chameleon may change its colours, but not its nature. Wherever sin touches there is a black spot. In the text the course of sin is threefold. 1. *The abuse of natural instincts.* God has placed in the body appetites and passions. In this respect man is on the same plane as the animal. Singularly enough, the animal is above man in the observance of their requirements. Neither gluttony, intemperance, nor incontinency has invaded the animal creation. Vicar Pritchard, of Llandovery, had a goat, which followed him through the town. At one period he was in the habit of frequenting public-houses. On one occasion some young men forced the goat to drink beer until it was drunk. The next day, when the vicar entered a public-house, the goat remained outside the door, and would on no account enter. The vicar learnt the lesson, and became a reformer of no mean order. The history of sin is read in the perversion of the natural man. 2. *The denial of Divine authority.* God has spoken in every age and to every man. Nature and Providence, as well as Revelation, have spoken in His name. Inspired men have delivered His commands, but sin has refused every voice, and rejected every message. The denial could not be made effectively without substituting error for truth, and forms of immorality for holiness. 3. *The persecution of the excellent of the earth.* Every virtue has been assailed in the persons of the virtuous. Every weapon has been used to torture and destroy the godly, in whose life the glory of God shone. If human nature is perverted, if the authority of God is contemned, and if the best characters are destroyed, what must be the consequence? Expulsion from heaven, and an abode with devils in the lake of fire!—*W. P.*

Ver. 9. *Michael and the Devil.*—We can hardly suppose that the interview between Michael and Satan was communicated to St. Jude by the Holy Ghost, because such a novel revelation

would have rather startled his readers than illustrated the truth he was setting before them. To treat it as a fable without foundation in fact would have weakened the argument of the apostle. Some think that the reference is to Zech. iii. 1, "And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan," etc. But there was no reference then made to the burial of Moses, and the similarity in the expression is too slender a foundation to connect the two. Origen mentions an apocryphal book called Ἀνάληψις τοῦ Μωσέως, which was extant in his time. That the apostle quoted from that book is not improbable, although there is nothing in the narrative before us to warrant the belief. Then there is the other supposition, that among the traditions held by the Jews there was one relative to a controversy between the two chiefs of the opposing angels about the burial of Moses. As these traditions were largely taught in those days, it may be that the apostle simply reads a lesson to the false teachers from their own teaching. They brought *railing accusations* against the apostles, which even an archangel dared not, as the higher and final judgment awaits all. An accusation of blasphemy is the strongest, as blasphemy is a sin of the deepest dye, which, when made against the Holy Ghost, is unpardonable. The apostle therefore conveys but one lesson by his reference to the dispute about the body of Moses, viz. that the final judgment is reserved in God's own keeping. 1. The text teaches that there are two orders of spirits in conflict concerning matters affecting the human race. Not only angels are ministering to the necessities of the saints, and devils using influence to destroy them; but the corner of the veil is lifted up in the text, that we may mentally see the battle-field on which these powerful spirits meet to contend for their side. The fact administers to the strength of our faith. Satan brings accusations against us, as was the case with Joshua; but the angel defends us, and hands over the accuser to a higher judgment. 2. The text teaches that controversy must be confined to its proper limits. This leads us to reflect on the spirit which has too often animated the controversies which have taken place between the polemics of the Church. Men have assumed so much authority as to consign their opponents to a literal fire and an eternal hell. In this they have assumed the function of judge. Michael was right, but he did not go further than controversy. However certain one may feel that he is contending for the truth, he must not utter imprecations on the head of his adversary. 3. The text teaches that judgment belongs to the Lord alone. The term "rebuke" implies far more than correction or admonition; it means to *censure*. Here we take it to indicate that God only has the power of final decision, and to Him must the prerogative be ascribed. Omniscience, impartiality, and power belong to Him. Christians must not avenge themselves, for vengeance belongs to the Lord. 4. The text teaches also another valuable lesson, viz. that the strongest side of controversy is an appeal to God. Bring your adversary into the presence of his Maker, and leave him in the Divine balance. He who can refer his matter to Him who is light, and in whom is no darkness, has his cause justified by the fact of his readiness to abide by God's word.—*W. P.*

Dispute over the Body of Moses.—St. Jude evidently refers to something that was familiar to his readers. Now the Bible preserves nothing that can conceivably be twisted into the support of such a legend as this. "No tradition, precisely corresponding with this statement, is found in any Rabbinic or apocryphal book now extant, not even in the book of Enoch, from which Jude has drawn so largely in other instances (vers. 6, 14). *Œcumenius*, indeed, writing in the tenth century, reports a tradition that Michael was

appointed to minister at the burial of Moses, and the devil urged that his murder of the Egyptian (Exod. ii. 12) had deprived him of the right of sepulture; and *Origen* states that the record of the dispute was found in a lost apocryphal book, known as "The Assumption of Moses"; but in both these instances it is possible that the traditions have grown out of the words of St. Jude, instead of being the foundation on which they rested. Rabbinic legends, however, though they do not furnish the precise fact to which St. Jude refers, show that a whole cycle of fantastic stories had gathered round the brief, mysterious report of the death of Moses, in Deut. xxxiv. 5, 6. It should be carefully noticed that the name Michael, for an angel or archangel, does not appear until Dan. x. 21. And it is in the book of Enoch" that he is prominent, as the "merciful, the patient, the holy Michael." Perhaps, however, we are wrong in seeing any reference to the *material body* of Moses. *John Bellamy* makes a novel suggestion, which may receive some consideration, as he bases it on a careful examination of the original Greek. He says that the word "archangel" is a compound word, and means "the first messenger." He thinks the reference is to John the Baptist, who was the "first messenger" of the new dispensation. The word "body" refers to the Messiah, as foretold in the shadows, types, and figures of the books of Moses; these shadows, types, and figures being called the "body of Moses," the whole assemblage of all things that had respect to the manifestation of the Redeemer. The word "devil" should be translated Satan, "an adversary," and really represents the rulers and Pharisees who resisted John's teaching and Christ's. "Thus we find that there was no celestial being called by the term 'archangel,' sent down from heaven to dispute with the devil about the fleshly body of Moses—no devil from hell, according to the vulgar opinion hitherto understood, to dispute with an archangel; but that it was the 'archmessenger,' *i.e.* the first messenger; and that the word *diabolo*, rendered 'the devil," was applied as a collective noun singular to the assembled body of Pharisees, the *adversary* of the mission of the Baptist, the declared, interested enemy of the gracious Redeemer." "Let those who suppose the contention was about the material body of Moses recollect that the material body of Moses had been buried in a valley in the land of Moab about fifteen hundred years, when it was said that Michael and the devil contended about it. A contention for the *material* body of Moses never took place between these two *immaterial* beings." Thus mystically *John Bellamy* deals with the passage; but probably sober-minded Bible students will regard this spiritualising explanation as extravagant and unreasonable, and will prefer the simpler suggestion of a familiar legend, used by way of illustration.—*H. B. D.*

Ver. 10. *Presumption.*—Dr. Bloomfield renders this verse as follows: "But those fellows, of things such as they have no knowledge of, they speak railingly; and, on the other hand, such things as they do know—naturally, or sensually, as the irrational animals — they corrupt themselves therein." At first sight it would appear that the meaning of the apostle is simply twofold; the holy truths of apostolic teaching, which the false teachers did not comprehend, they treated with scorn; the natural instincts, which they enjoyed in common with the brute creation, they abused. But on looking at the context we are inclined to think that there is a connection between the blasphemy of Divine things and the perversion of natural instincts. The parallel passage in 2 Pet. ii. 12, 13 says: "But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own cor-

ruption; and shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time." Dr. Peile develops the brevity of the expression thus: "In those things they first vitiate, then destroy themselves; first vitiate the thing (or *doctrine*, by abuse), and destroy themselves in that abuse." St. Peter had before said of them: "And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." One of the perversions was their covetousness, and through feigned words they made merchandise of the saints. One would infer that they sold indulgences, and pretended to absolve the people from their sins on payment of money. It also appears that there were other practices of such a forbidden nature that no apostle would disgrace his epistle by the mention of the same.

I. **The presumption of ignorance.**—The virulent opposition of the false teachers to the truths taught by the apostles, and their setting up opinions of their own as the standard of morality, was typical of a course of action from which the Church has in every age suffered. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." This class of ignorance is to be distinguished from the absence of knowledge. He who has never heard the gospel must be ignorant of it; but in his case there is no assumption against its truths. On the other hand, false teachers were wilfully ignorant of the principles of Christianity because they were opposed to their corrupt practices. It was what Charnock calls *practical atheism*. In this age, when religious knowledge is so general, much of the opposition to the teaching of the Church starts from the same source. We must wake up to the fact that with the heart man believeth unto righteousness. Faith in the truths of Revelation is impossible without a change of heart. The first step is to convert men, and then educate them.

II. **The sin of presumption.**—Those who have presumed to teach religion to others, whether their teaching has been a distorted gospel or some opinion of their own, have led people to the committal of sins far more heinous than is found in the heart of a heathen land. The morality of literal ignorance is far better than that of false teaching. This we have seen in the rise of various sects, some of which survive until the present day. Julian the apostate was a very violent opponent of Christianity, whose teaching led many into various immoralities. In the face of the boldness which is abroad, avowing that certain unnatural and immoral courses are lawful and desirable, the duty of the Church is clear. As the darkness flies from the light, so libertinism will not stand the presence of a high moral character. Therefore we think that the first concern of the Church is to utterly forsake all questionable practices, and confront the world with the virtues of the life of Jesus Christ.—*Selected.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 12—19.

Three Types of Mischief-makers.—In ver. 11 three men are introduced as types from the Old Testament history of the men who were putting the faith and purity of the Christian Churches in such grave peril. They are Cain, Balaam, and Korah. But it is evident that St. Jude had more in his mind associated with these names than we can find in the Scripture records. Round these three names Rabbinical and other legends had grown up, and in the Jewish mind there was a kind of horror at the mention of these names. It was saying the severest thing that could be said of the mischief-makers to liken them to Cain, or Balaam, or Korah. The Rabbinic legends represented Cain as the offspring, not of Adam, but of Sammael, the evil spirit, and Eve, and as the parent of other evil spirits, and therefore as connected with the idea of foul and unnatural impurity. The

point prominent in the remembrance of Balaam is his scheming to ruin Israel through enticements to sensuality. And a strange Rabbinic legend, while it placed the souls of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in Gehenna, represented them as not tormented there. The paragraph now before us divides into three sections.

I. **The Cain type of mischief-makers** (vers. 12, 13).—We need not follow those precise suggestions which come from the legendary additions; we may keep to those which connect with the Scriptural narratives. Then the Cain type represents self-seekers. Cain did not want anything absolutely wrong. His want was unworthy, and revealed an unworthy disposition, simply because it was so utterly self-centred and selfish. And there ever have been men in Christ's Church, who proved to be most serious mischief-makers, not because they have done things positively wrong, but because they have brought such a self-seeking spirit into it. Nothing more surely, or more utterly, spoils the peace of Christ's Church, than the presence of a member who is merely "seeking his own things." Such a man, like Diotrephes, "loves to have the pre-eminence," and will be sure to push and strive to get it. Precisely what the self-interested man cannot bear is to have any favour shown to a brother, an Abel. Rejoicing in a brother's blessing or success he cannot do. The poor soul can do nothing but rejoice in his own; and fret—and fret other people—if neither success nor blessing come to him. St. Jude is intensely severe in dealing with the Cain type of mischief-makers. They appear at the love-feasts, when everybody ought to be mindful of his brother, and finding every way of expressing brotherly love; and in a sharp sentence he shows the selfish men sitting at the feast, "feeding themselves without fear." If there are any delicacies on the table, *they have got them.* If their neighbours right and left have had for a long while empty plates, they neither see nor care. We know the men only too well. The Church of to-day is troubled with their presence and influence. St. Jude likens them to four things; declares how certainly they must come into Divine judgment; and vigorously denounces the spirit which is so manifest in their conversation and intercourse. The four things to which they are likened are: 1. "Clouds without water," self-contained, that have no blessing for anybody. Aggravating clouds, that show themselves as grandly as they can, wandering about the sky, but never break and pour refreshing rains upon the thirsty earth. 2. "Trees whose fruit withereth." Aggravating trees! Watch them in spring-time—there is good show of blossom; watch them in summer—the fruitage seems enlarging; come to them in autumn—there is nothing for you: all is shrivelled. A tree for show, that had no blessing for anybody in it. 3. "Raging waves"; this suggests a darker side of the selfish man. He is always fussy, always worrying, always wanting to put everybody else straight; always mounting up like the waves, and making a great noise, and doing nothing, only showing his own noisy helplessness. 4. "Wandering stars," who will come into no sort of order, persist in taking their own way, and will surely find the woe of being out of God's order. Then St. Jude declares how certainly all self-ordering, self-seeking men must come into Divine judgment, taking his sentences (vers. 14, 15) almost precisely from a familiar literary work of his day, known as the book of Enoch. It is precisely the same basis of Divine judgment that our Lord presents in His judgment parable, and in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Those who did no ministry were the self-contained, self-interested professors. The rich man was wholly self-satisfied, and never once thought of ministering. The great judgment of God falls upon those who, while bearing the Christ-name, were nothing to anybody, and did nothing for anybody—even as Cain. And upon them St. Jude pours out his denunciations, as well he might. See these men in any Christian Church. They are the grumblers, the dissatisfied, the boasters. They are the men who make much of the rich, flatter them, to get what they can for themselves out of them,

"Their mouth speaketh great swelling words." Alas! how often we have heard them! You would think the world was made, and the Church founded, entirely for the honour of these men. And they have "men's persons in admiration because of advantage." They are "courtiers, flatterers, and parasites." The temper characterised is that which fawns as in wondering admiration on the great, while all the time the flatterer is simply seeking what profit he can get out of him whom he flatters. There is no real Christian life unless the Cain spirit is wrought out of a man; unless self is dethroned, and sonship and brotherhood enthroned.

II. **The Balaam type of mischief-makers.**—A portion of ver. 16 evidently is suggested by the remembrance of Balaam. It is not essential to the selfish man that he should seek money only; but where there is *gain-seeking* there is an additional power for mischief-making in Christ's Church. The gain-seeker is always a selfish man; but the selfish man is not always a *gain*-seeker. Balaam always had his eye upon the rewards of divination, and he could do mean and shameful things under the inspiration of that gain-seeking. Illustration may also be taken from Simon the Sorcerer, and from Demas. The love of money is partly a bad bias of natural disposition; but as such the Christian professor is bound to resist it and work it out. "The *love* of money is the root of all evil." Let the covetous, grasping spirit get into any Christian community, it will speedily effect its spiritual degradation and ruin. All high and holy motives fade away when the sordid ones are forced to the front.

III. **The Korah type of mischief-makers.**—These are the credit-seekers, who are sharply defined by St. Jude as "they who separate themselves." They are the schismatics and sectarians. They want to be first. They can only get first by being "otherwise" in something. All sects that have broken off from the fellowship of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church have been led into their separateness by some Korah-typed man. For all true freedom of thought and life, within due bounds of authority, the Church provides, and this freedom should suffice for all who are humble-minded, and supremely want the honour of Christ, and the unity and blessing of God's people. Credit of superior knowledge, or of keener spiritual insight, will soon make a man masterful within the Church of Christ, and there are always weak souls who are easily carried away by the positiveness, the dogmatic tone of the over-confident man.

These three types of Church troublers have been found in every age, and are found among us to-day. But he whose supreme aim is "the glory of Christ" can be no "self-seeker"; he whose great concern is being a blessing to others can be no "gain-seeker"; and he whose whole effort is devoted to securing the welfare of the community can be no mere *credit*-seeker. We must not be after the pattern of Cain, or of Balaam, or of Korah. "One is our master, even Christ, and all we are brethren."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Vers. 14, 15. *The Book of Enoch.*—That there is a very close resemblance between this passage and the book of Enoch (ii.) will be seen by comparing the following translation: "Behold He comes with ten thousand of His saints, to execute judgment upon them, and destroy the wicked, and reprove all the carnal for everything which the sinful and ungodly have done, and committed against Him."

Jude's Use of the Book of Enoch.—As the book of Enoch had probably been in existence for a century before St. Jude wrote, and was easily accessible, it is more natural to suppose

that he quoted here, as in previous instances, what he thought edifying, than to adopt either of the two strained hypotheses: (1) that the writer had received what he quotes through a tradition independent of the book of Enoch, that tradition having left no trace of itself in any of the writings of the Old Testament; or (2) that he was guided by a special inspiration to set the stamp of authenticity upon the one genuine prophecy which the apocryphal writer had imbedded in a mass of fantastic inventions.—*A. Plummer, D.D.*

Book of Enoch by Different Authors.—One of the most curious remains of early Christian literature that have come down to us is the Apocalypse, or book of Enoch. It is the product of different authors. The main bulk of the work, describing the visit of Enoch to paradise, and the vision of the future history of the world which was revealed to him there, was written by a Jew about 30 B.C. The rest of the work has been proved by Hilgenfeld to have been composed by a Christian at the beginning of the second century. It is this part of the book which has been assigned by Ewald and others to the first century before Christ, and regarded as evidence that the leading conceptions and terms of Christianity were already familiar to the Jewish people before the coming of Christ.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 20—23.

The Believer's Daily Endeavour.—St. Jude seems to have been almost carried away by the intensity of his feeling as he wrote of the mischievous influence of the false teachers. There was in him much of the spirit of the Jewish Zealot, as there was also in his brother James. The former part of his epistle is full of the fiercest denunciations, but it would have been in every way a mistake if he had carried it on to the end in the same spirit. Warnings may be most necessary and most valuable; but they are not wisely left to stand alone. In moral as well as religious training counsels as to what should be done must always blend with warnings as to what should not be done. "What to do" is even more important than "What to avoid." Christian teachers need always to keep in mind the lesson of their Lord's illustration of the house that was "empty, swept, and garnished," but not filled up with good spirits, and so easily came to be the abode of more and worse spirits than dwelt in it at first. Turning out evil never can suffice. St. Jude therefore closes his epistle with positive advice to the Christian disciples, and suggestive directions concerning their daily life and daily endeavour. First, however, reminding them that the conditions of peril in which they found themselves had been anticipated by the teachings and prophecies of the apostles, who had given them the sure test by which to judge all who claimed to be teachers. The teacher is at once judged and condemned if his life shows licence of sensual indulgence; and the teaching is at once declared to be false, they who offer it "have not the Spirit," if its practical influence is to relax the strictness of Christian purity, and give believers licence for any forms of sensuous gratification. It must never for one moment be lost from the Christian view, that the *holy* is the *true*, and the self-indulgent is the false. No excuse, no disguise, no persuasion, can ever make an unclean, sensual, or sensuous thing Christian. Christ is righteous. Christianity is righteousness. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." It is the absolute and universally applicable test of all claimants to be teachers to-day as truly as in the days of St. Jude. Eloquence is nothing, emotional fervour is nothing; righteousness is everything. A man's work must stand this test—Does it lift men into a higher plane of Christian restraints, wise

mastery of life, and holy living? But St. Jude felt that it was not enough to say this, and to say this firmly. He must also give plain indications concerning that holy living. He must remind them of the things that should be in their daily endeavour, if they were to "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." And the thing that more especially arrests attention is the skilful way in which St. Jude makes his counsels cover all the departments of the Christian life. He has a suggestive word for each, and so in effect intimates that if the whole man is every day brought into the obedience of Christ, fully used in the effort to gain and to maintain the righteousness that Christ requires, the man will be absolutely safeguarded from the subtleties of false teachers, whose offered licence can be no possible attraction, and from the surroundings of evil, which can only be influential on the carnally-minded man. St. Jude has four practical counsels related to the daily Christian endeavours. One concerns the intellectual Christian life—"building up yourselves on the most holy faith"; one concerns the emotional life—"praying in the Holy Ghost"; one concerns the practical Christian life—"keep yourselves in the love of God"; and one concerns the imaginative Christian life—"looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." St. Jude's covering in this way every department of the Christian life reminds us that we have to make an entire sacrifice of ourselves, make of ourselves a whole burnt offering, a living sacrifice; reserving nothing, but laying body, soul, and spirit upon the altar. The absoluteness of our safety from all evil depends on the entireness of our consecration.

I. **Our daily endeavour concerns the intellectual Christian life.**—"Building up yourselves on your most holy faith." We are familiar with apostolic advice as to the raising of an edifice of good character on the foundations of a Christian profession; but that is not in the mind of St. Jude. He is advising a continual daily endeavour to strengthen the foundations of faith; to get clearer, fuller, firmer apprehensions of the great Christian verities, the primary Christian principles. There is a necessary Christian knowledge. Growth in knowledge is necessary even to security of Christian living. Our Lord said, in His great prayer, "This is life eternal, to *know* Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." And St. Peter bids disciples "grow in grace and *knowledge* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." St. Jude speaks of "our most holy faith" as if in his day the primary Christian truths had been arranged into some sort of creed, which was well known, and which bore upon it the stamp of apostolic authority. No such creed is given in the New Testament, and no such creed remains among the Church traditions; but it is not difficult to gather from the various apostolic writings those truths which were common subjects of instruction by all the early teachers. It will be found that they mainly concern the person of Christ, and include His claims to Messiahship, His proper humanity, His essential Divinity, His personal sinlessness, His resurrection from the dead, His present claim to service. And perhaps it has not yet been sufficiently apprehended that one of the truths most deeply impressed on the apostolic mind was the absolute demand Christ made that He should be served *by righteousness*. St. Jude advises the disciples to make daily endeavour to get clearer apprehensions of these primary truths and principles, and a fuller recognition of their practical applications to life and conduct. It is easy to see how directly our security will depend on our systematic growth in Christian intelligence. Let a man be content with what he knows of Christian truths, and he will surely find that what he knows gradually fades down and becomes ineffective, unable to offer any sort of resistance to the subtle forms in which error may assail. The laws of mental life apply to religious truth. Only by enlarging our scientific knowledge can we keep the scientific knowledge we have. If we will not go on, we must

inevitably go back. And good truth loosely and ineffectively held can present little or no effective resistance to the insidious attacks of intellectual error. We need to find out how to make a wise daily endeavour to add to the sum of our Christian knowledge; not satisfied with the mere luxury of some religious sentiment, and the satisfaction of having felt some feeling, but determined that we will see some truth more clearly, or grip some truth more firmly—that, and that alone, would be "building ourselves up on our most holy faith."

II. **Our daily endeavour concerns the emotional Christian life.**—"Praying in the Holy Ghost." Many people in these days seem to have made up their minds that the Christian life is nothing but an emotional life, and so their daily endeavour is simply to arouse and increase emotion. And when effort is made to check the extravagance and get the emotional element to keep its fitting proportions, it is readily assumed that injury is being done. The emotional side of human nature is the cause of our gravest anxieties. The history of Christ's Church reveals the fact that neither heresies nor inconsistencies have ever wrought mischiefs in the Church comparable for one moment to those wrought by the exaggerations and extravagances of religious emotion. For proofs reference may be made to Isaac Taylor's books, *The History of Enthusiasm* and the *History of Fanaticism*. But the exaggeration unto perilous weakness must not prevent our pleading, under the leadership of St. Jude, for a daily culture of Christian emotion. There ought to be a daily glow of feeling, a fervour in our practical piety. That is indicated in the expression, "Praying in the Holy Ghost"; for what is peculiar in that sentence is not "praying," but this particular kind of praying, "in the Holy Ghost." No other New Testament writer uses the same term, though St. Paul indicates how we are helped by the Spirit in our prayer. What St. Jude has in mind is this—if the Holy Spirit dwells in us, we shall be subject to His impulses, and especially His impulses to prayer. Let us take care that we respond to those impulses, never resisting or quenching the Spirit. His work is largely a work in Christian emotion. He will inspire it; but He will tone it, and limit it, and keep it in wise bounds. So often men respond to the Spirit's impulse, but fail to respond to the Spirit's checks. They start with the Spirit, and then get altogether beyond Him; they, as it were, take the bit in their teeth, and are away on their own line, but are trying to persuade themselves and others that they still have the Holy Ghost. Praying then represents the emotional side of Christian life; we are to make daily endeavour harmoniously to culture and to express religious emotion. We are to pray in the impulse of the Holy Ghost; but we are to pray in the limitations of the Holy Ghost. Our praying, our whole emotional Christian life, is to be absolutely kept in the sphere of the Holy Ghost. And St. Jude intimates that in this will be found our best security from the influence of false teachers. In exaggerated religious emotion the sectarian, and the teacher of moral licence, have always found their most promising seed-beds.

III. **Our daily endeavour concerns the practical Christian life.**—"Keeping yourselves in the love of God." That will keep us in the love of God which will keep us in any right human relations. How does the wife keep herself in the love of her husband, the child in the love of the home, the friend in the love of the friend? There is no new condition for the maintenance of our relations with God our Father. The Lord Jesus told us very plainly how He "kept Himself in the love of God." "I do always the things that please Him." It is the universal law for all Christ's disciples. The daily endeavour to live a life of practical obedience and service can alone "keep us in the love of God." Jesus said, "If a man love Me, he will keep My word: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him." This counsel of St. Jude's is needed in every age, as a caution against the errors into which men

readily fall. It is so easy to overpress the intellectual element in Christian life, and become merely doctrinal and sectarian, spending all the force of our regenerate life in contending for opinions, and making particular settings of truth the occasion for separations and wranglings and bitterness. And it is so easy to overpress the emotional element in Christian life, and waste our spiritual strength in sighs and groans and feelings, and imagine that we are unusually pious on the ground of our religious excitements. Therefore our Lord and His apostles so constantly urge upon the disciples that religion is practical. It is the conduct, the tone, the doings, the maintaining of right relations, the putting of good principles into practice. St. John stamps for ever the Christly claim to real, practical, daily, godliness of doing when he says, "He that *doeth* righteousness is righteous, even as He [Christ] is righteous." And He was righteous in this, that "He went about *doing* good." Never be afraid of *doing*—that is the expression of your new life in Christ; for it is that alone which can keep you in the love of God. Doing in order to make a claim upon Divine favour is hopelessly wrong. But doing to express our sense of Divine favour is hopefully right. It is what God looks for. It is what the world asks of all professors. You may hear the voice of men around you every day, saying to you—"Have you faith, and new life through faith? Then let us see it; show it in your works." Righteousness, service, and charity before men; obedience, submission, and holiness before God—these alone can keep us in the acceptance of men or in the love of God.

IV. **Our daily endeavour concerns the imaginative Christian life.**—"Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Essential to the completeness of human nature is the imaginative faculty, on which rests the possibility of conceiving the future, and creating an inspiring hope. Only in imagination has the Christian anything before him. Perfect holiness and happy heaven are our hope. No doubt hope well-grounded, but still hope only, the creation of our imaginations. Faith says a hope "that maketh not ashamed." But how seldom do we put it to ourselves that the culturing of the Christian imagination—and that is done by feeding and exercising it—is part of our daily endeavour. Look down on the book of truth we must. Look in on the moods of the soul we must. Look around on the duties of the hour we must. Look on and away to the "battlements of the Golden City," and the "markets of the Golden Year," we must. The man who keeps hope bright, well proportioned in its culture to the other Christian faculties, will be secure against the subtleties of evil. He is satisfied with the substance of things hoped for. Our daily endeavour as Christians—in which lies the assurance of our safety in the midst of the enticing and entrancing evils of the day—concerns our all-round and harmonious daily culture. We are minds—but not minds only—and must grow in apprehension of truth. We are feelings—but not feelings only—and must nourish all hallowing emotions. We are actions—but not actions only—and must sanctify our doings. We are hopes—but not hopes only—and must keep imaginations filled with the visions of the "King in His beauty" and the "home over there." In a word, we must be "complete in Him."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Vers. 20, 21. *The Secret of being kept.*—Thus arranged the participles represent the *means* by which the injunction is followed. Compare 1 Pet. i. 13, which is exactly similar in construction and closely akin in sentiment. Jude is the prophet of the apostasy. He sounds the final note of warning. The key-word is "kept." Those who embrace the faith and con-

tend for the faith are *preserved* unto the day of presentation; those who reject and oppose the faith are *reserved* unto the day of retribution. Those who kept not their first estate, and are kept for judgment, are contrasted with those who keep themselves in the love of God, and are kept by His power. There are two sides to this *keeping*—a *divine* side (ver. 24) and a *human* side (vers. 20, 21). The words *preserve* and *persevere* are so much alike that one can be spelt from the other; and so if we are to be preserved, it is equally true that we must persevere. *How to persevere* is the subject of this text. The text itself supplies the divisions: 1. The great duty and privilege—keep yourselves in the love of God. 2. The way to do it—building, praying, looking. We begin with the three *means* of perseverance: 1. A perseverance of *growth*. Building up yourselves on your most holy faith means carrying up character and conduct toward perfection. The foundation is laid, which is Jesus Christ. We have simply to add stone to stone and story to story, and use material consistent with the foundation (1 Cor. iii. 10-15). Faith seems to stand here, as it often does, for the *truth held in faith*; what is believed and the belief of it both being included. And the disciple is to go on adding to faith, virtue, etc., until the whole life is complete (see 2 Pet. i. 5-7). Two conditions are essential to this growth: (1) growing knowledge of the word of God, which supplies the material for faith; (2) growing obedience of the word, which incorporates the truth in the life. The word is the quarry from which obedience takes the blocks that are built into conduct. To study the Scriptures daily and practise what we learn builds this building up, and nothing else will; it also insures that right material shall be used. 2. A perseverance of *prayer*. As the word of God supplies the truth to be embraced by faith, so prayer supplies the energy and force to appropriate truth, and incorporate it into our life. If the word of God is the quarry, prayer is the power which turns the stone into building material and puts it in its place. The phrase is peculiar, "praying *in the Holy Ghost*." Elsewhere the Holy Ghost is represented as praying *in us* (Rom. viii. 26, 27). Both representations are true. Here the Spirit of God is represented as an atmosphere necessary to prayer. We can only persevere in prayer as we abide in the Spirit. A worldly atmosphere stifles prayer. We must breathe *in* the Spirit, and then prayer is the breathing *out* of the Spirit unto God. Here again is a twofold condition of praying: first there must be daily fellowship with the Spirit, or we shall not have the spirit of prayer; and again there must be daily exercise of prayer itself as communion with God. Such prayer becomes both a protection from temptation and a means of assimilation to God. 3. A perseverance of *hope* (compare 1 Pet. i. 1-13). Hope looks forward into the future. The final consummation of the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ waits to be revealed. We are pilgrims journeying toward a better country, and are passing through an enemy's territory. Here we are to have only our *tent*; our permanent *home* is beyond. Hence the importance of fastening our gaze upon the city which hath foundations. All apostasy comes from looking at the past or at the present. To dwell on past attainments makes progress impossible. To be absorbed in the present is to follow the spirit of the age, always contrary to God. If faith provides the *quarry* and prayer the *energy* for building up Christian life, hope presents the *ideal* of the structure, and teaches us how to build. It becomes to us a perpetual, inspiring, heavenly vision, and the building grows into conformity with it. We are now prepared to appreciate the injunction, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." This suggests, first, that our only hope is in *positive culture* of holiness. Negative resistance to evil is

not enough; we must overcome evil with good. We must learn the "expulsive power of a new affection" which drives out evil and replaces it by good. Ulysses sought to escape the sirens by being bound to the mast of his vessel. Orpheus drowned their voices with his lyre and sacred songs. Secondly, it is in the *love of God*; not our love to Him, but His love to us, that we must find keeping power. Archbishop Ussher, when an old man, lacked animal heat, and he used to seek to be constantly bathed in sunshine. When too feeble to go out of doors, he would be wheeled in his chair to an eastern window in the morning, a southerly window at noon, and a western window toward evening, and *abide in the sunshine.—A. T. Pierson, D.D.*

Ver. 21. *Keeping in the Love.*—St. Jude wrote his epistle with an evident and direct purpose. He found, as St. Paul also found, that in Churches formed among the Gentile peoples there was exceeding danger lest the truth should be debased through the self-indulgence, the immoralities, and the false teachings by which such indulgences and moral evils were supported. St. Jude pleads with those on whom he could exert an influence, that they should "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints"; and, in very vigorous language, he denounces the iniquity of these inconsistent and unworthy professors. Then, in the closing of the epistle, he gives the principle on which alone members can be guarded from surrounding evils. The text is part of a loving and faithful persuasion of the believers.

Our most pressing Christian duty.—It may often be helpful to us to gather up the various claims and requirements of a religious profession into some very simple, but suggestive and inspiring principle. There are, in the New Testament, many, various, and minute injunctions and counsels for the guidance and regulation of a Christian life; and yet we cannot fail to observe that the apostles seem much more anxious to implant, and thoroughly establish, quick, living truths and principles, than to take the mere shaping and moulding of the details of Christian conduct into their control. They would rather make the tree good, and leave the fresh, strong, healthy sap to fashion its own leafage and flowering and fruiting. And it is well that we should follow apostolic models, and seek with much more anxiety to culture into vigour and health godly principles, than merely to fashion into set forms the minute details of Christian relations and Christian conduct. Let us make the tree good, and we need not fear for the fruit. But here we are met by a seriously hindering difficulty. There is not usually among Christian people a proper faith in the quickening, inspiring, controlling, and guiding power of established moral principle. Even good people persist in asking exactly what they ought to *do* in such and such circumstances; and so we have, again and again, to throw men back on the power of simple first principles. If we really know what the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is, what the foundation laws of the new spiritual kingdom are, then we cannot fail to be delicately sensitive in all the details of Christian conduct, to that which becometh the gospel. Our Christian duty is here set before us, not in a series of minute and carefully adjusted counsels, but in one simple, comprehensive, searching, yet glorifying principle—"Keep yourselves in the love of God." Our Saviour pressed this upon His disciples as if it were the very essence of their duty, "Continue ye in My love." And the apostle Paul states what he had found could be the glorifying principle of a life—of a right noble and heroic life—when he said, "The love of Christ constraineth us." Our text means in part—

1. *Keep yourselves in the full conviction of the truth of God's love.*—That

truth is the one special and distinctive revelation of God that was made to us by Christ and in Christ. That is the "life and immortality which He brought to light by His gospel"; for our future can only be properly seen in the light of God's love. That is the central foundation truth of the Christian religion; it is the thing in which it differs from all other religious systems; it is the one truth concerning which we ought to be unspeakably jealous. Before Christ came men had some weak notions that *love* was one of the Divine attributes, but it was only one of them, and by no means prominent, certainly not the ruling one. The apostle John clearly marks off the Christian man from all the rest of the world by this as his peculiarity, "We have known and believed the love which God hath to us." To believe in the love of God, and to come into the forgiving, cleansing, quickening, correcting, sanctifying power of that love, is to become a Christian. And this is but another way of saying it is "coming to Christ," it is "believing on Christ." We may have expected to find such a counsel in the sacred word as this—Keep yourselves in the justice of God; or this—Keep yourselves in the holiness of God; or this—Keep yourselves in the commandments of God. But there is nothing of the kind, because for renewed, right-hearted Christian men and women "justice" is quite safe, "holiness" is quite safe, the "commandments" are quite safe, if only they will "believe in the love which God hath unto them." And yet what a half-fear there is in some of our hearts that this cannot be sufficient, that to state things in this way is to imperil something very vital. But that can only be because we do not fill the word "love" with the fulness of its meaning. We have a half-fear that love is weak and easyful. Thinking of frail human love, we fancy that it may do things that are not absolutely right; it can carry away on its impulses the judgment, the conscience, and the will. Men and women do, too often, make their fond affections excuse unworthy things. And therefore, even when we speak of God's love, some of us feel as if we must shore the weak thing up, and buttress it with notions —theological notions—of His justice, His moral government, His holiness, and His law. And because our hearts are filled with these unworthy and hindering notions, we cannot receive the fulness of the revelation of God's love to us in Christ Jesus. We will not let Christ show us how just, how holy, how searching, how inexorable, that love of God is. We should be satisfied if we could see it as Christ saw it, if we could feel it as Christ felt it. What is love as applied to God? What is the love of God as it is shown to us in Christ? The answer is this—You must know what the love of the Man Christ Jesus was, when He tarried among the ignorant and the suffering; and watching Him, correcting, counselling, comforting, you will learn the greatness and the graciousness of the love of God. You will see that love can reprove, can chastise, can say, "Get thee behind me, Satan," to an erring disciple. You will see that love keeps rods for smiting, and refining fires for cleansing. No law, no judge, is so inexorable as love, which will not take its strong, stern hand off its beloved, until they are "whiter than snow," cleansed so as no fuller on earth can whiten them. Love is the corner-stone, on which the whole superstructure of the faith rests securely. It underlies the exceeding great mystery of the Incarnation. Love is the very life and strength of the day by day earthly humiliation. Love is the all-satisfying explanation of the great Atonement. Love gives the life-force to the message of grace sent forth from the cross to every creature. We preach Christ. We set Him forth in all His thousand-fold forms of grace, in order that we may bring sinful men to know and believe the love which God hath unto them. Now St. Jude tells us that of this great truth we must be, personally and individually, most

anxious. You and I must take care that we keep in the love of God. We must never let any theories, any teachings, any passing excitements of the hour, any exigencies of theological opinion, any class or sectarian sentiments, put in peril, or cast into the shadow of neglect, this first of Christian truths. We must be jealous with a godly jealousy over any aspect of the Divine Being which men may try to press in the front of this. In the sphere of Christian doctrines remember that this is the absolute first of truths—"God is love." "He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God."

2. *Keep yourselves in the comforting assurance of God's love.*—We should be able to say, not only, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me," but also, with an actual, present application, "He *loveth* me, and *giveth* Himself for me." For that love is actually over us and around us now; it wraps us about, as an enfolding and enveloping atmosphere; in it we live, and move, and have our being. If it be indeed so, then we hold the secret key that unlocks the meaning of all our cares, all our trials, all our losses, all our perplexities, and all our fears. We make our mistakes; we come into calamities; we stumble in our waywardness; we walk where the road is rough, and the clouds hang down low and darken; we lift burdens on our own shoulders; we have to carry burdens for others: but in all these things let us "keep ourselves in the love of God." He rules and overrules. He, just like the holy father, trains His children through their mistakes and follies. Our lots in life may be very suffering ones, very anxious ones; but however dark they may be, let us never doubt God's love to us. In that assurance we may find unfailing consolation and strength. "The light of that love is our guide through the gloom"; and with fuller, deeper feeling than even the ancient psalmist knew, we may sing and say, "When my father and my mother forsake me"—which, to many of us, is the almost impossible of earthly calamity—"then the Lord will take me up."

3. *That we put ourselves under the daily constrainings of God's love.*—Here in our common earthly relations there is no persuasion urging us to goodness like the daily influence of a true and faithful love. How that dear earthly friend, that beloved companion of our life, moves and sways and inspires us, guards and keeps and purifies us! We feel as if we could not do wrong and disgrace that love. We must be beautiful for the honour of that love. We cannot go where our beloved one would be grieved to find us. We cannot speak what would pain our friend to hear. That earthly love is, in gracious measures, a sweet and sanctifying influence. But how much more should this be upon us the constraining power of the love of God! Surely His love should be the supreme impulse to holy living, the inspiration of all high Christian attainment, the constraint of all holy and earnest labour. The apostle Paul is the great human example of the holy, devoted, self-denying Christian, and he can only explain the Divine beauty and consecrated energy of his life—as we ought to be able to explain ours—by saying, "The love of Christ constraineth us." That I may be very direct and practical, let me show you that the counsel of the text bears this further persuasion upon you—Beware lest anything should take you from under the shadow of God's love. I need only suggest what things may do this. Pride of heart will. All forms of subtle self-reliance will. There is a tender gentleness, a gracious humility, a trustful dependence, a self-forgetting love, about everybody who really believes in the love of God, and lives in the sanctifying warmth of it. If you have lost these things, or at least, if you have lost the bloom off these things, if you feel very well satisfied with yourselves, and very confident that you can stand steady in your own strength, then you may be sure that you have come from under

the shadow of the love. For it has this for its peculiarity—it always makes men meek, dependent, gentle. Pandering to the appetites and passions of the body, or to the pride of the intellect, will be sure to take you away from the love. That love can only dwell with the temperate, the pure—the saintly ones, who walk in white—the self-restrained, the modest; so that, if any of us are determined to be self-indulgent, or if we will cherish conceit of our intellectual superiority, the love will be sure to remove afar off. All the manifold phases of unbrotherliness put in peril our relations with the Divine love. For if we do not "love our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen?" Unwatchfulnesses and wilful disobediences also take us away from the love. For the Master Himself said, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments; and My Father will love you." So it is made quite plain for us all that God's love is no weak thing. It is, indeed, a most searching thing, a most sensitive thing. It is most quickly grieved. It is wounded with a rough touch. It may be hurt by our commonplace, every-day Christian frailties. If we fear that we have got away from that life-constraining love of God, let us hear the voice of His servant, calling us back under the shadow, and bidding us "keep ourselves in the love of God."

The Sense of God's Love.—If you had been born a Jew, it would not have seemed strange to you that you had to hear continually about God's *law*. It was daily read. There were times of special rehearsal (Josiah, Nehemiah). As born a Christian, it is not strange that you should continually hear about *love*. This is the central force of the gospel; it wields the moral power, the "bands of a man." The love that is characteristic of the gospel gathers round the revelation of the Father. Divine Fatherhood was shadowed over in Judaism; it was there, but it was not made prominent. It takes the first and front place in Christianity. Fatherhood is clearly seen in the patriarchal religion. And that was the universal religion of its day. Fatherhood is in Judaism; and realised at least by the pious and spiritually-minded Jew. But Fatherhood gains a fuller meaning in Christianity. The gospel is really this—the power of God's love on human souls.

I. **The beginning of the Christian life is the revelation to the soul of the love of God.**—It seems that a special revelation was needed to teach men God's *love*. Nature alone cannot teach it, because of its uniformity; Providence alone cannot, because of its perplexity; Judaism could not, because of the sternness of its law; and heathenism could not, because of its coarse polytheistic and sensual associations. The difficulty of receiving it lies in our own natures, enfeebled and degraded by sin. Our consciousness of sin makes us think God unloving, just as the erring child thinks the father cruel, and the faithless man with the one talent thought his master hard and unjust. As revealed, the love of God is no mere *statement*; it is *an exhibited love*, exhibited in *a recovering purpose*, in *a priceless gift*, in a mysterious sacrifice. But, as revealed, it needs *appropriation by us*. When appropriated it becomes a power to change our spirit and our life. It changes our views of *God*, *life*, *duty*, *eternity*, etc. We see all in the light of "crucified love."

II. **The continuance of Christian life depends on keeping up the sense of God's love.**—That alone can keep us sincere and earnest. Love is more exacting than law, more inexorable than law. Love is jealous lest its object should lose one of the smallest blessings of obedience and goodness. Love is jealous lest its object should find and experience one of the sorrows that attend upon evil. Illustrate by the greater jealousy over a *son* than over an *apprentice*. Nothing will keep us so pure, so steadfast, and so humble,

as urging upon us, ever afresh, the assurance of God's love.

III. **The one effort of our Christian life should be to keep in the sense of God's love.**—In our earthly life we know the help and the joy of keeping in the love of mother, wife, or friend. It must be more helpful and more blessed to keep in the love of *God*. To lose the light of God's love is more—far more—than losing the sunlight off the flowers. How shall we keep in the love? 1. Cherish every loving thought of God that may be suggested to you. 2. Walk in righteousness, and you will ever be in the smiles of the love. 3. Watch over all your opportunities of heart-fellowship with Christ, for friendship needs communion. 4. Cultivate the child-spirit. Illustrate by our Lord putting the child in the midst of the men. No doubting in the child-heart. But can this counsel apply to all, "*keep* in the love"? Do we all believe the love which God hath unto us? Are any living on in sin, because they do not believe the love? Have you felt how God's love to sinners shines forth from Calvary? I beseech you then, *Come* into the love, that we may be able to say also unto you, "*Keep* yourselves in the love of God."

Vers. 22, 23. *Mercy for the Victims of Evil Influence.*—The beautiful turn of these verses exhibits in full force the Christian disposition of St. Jude. The former part of the epistle, taken by itself, conveys the impression that the apostle was a mere declamator and denunciator—a master of withering censure. But now the very men whom he had severely reprimanded are to be sought and reclaimed. We have no room to give the learned criticism of the text supplied by our great scholars. The Revisers have accepted it, with a marginal note, to remind the reader that the first part is doubted. After carefully reading the *pros* and *cons*, we see no valid reason for rejecting the portion in dispute, nor is there any difficulty in the rendering. "Those disputing with you, have mercy upon them; and save some, by snatching them as brands from the burning; have mercy on some with caution; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." The method of treating the three classes on Christian grounds is laid down here, and is as applicable to-day as it then was. 1. The doubters. They are to be treated with consideration and kindliness. Doubt is sometimes the result of imperfect training, or a misapprehension of the truth. There was a class then who were not able to judge between the teaching of the apostles and that of the false teachers. They needed a tender treatment to bring them to a knowledge of the truth. This is a very large class in our own day. They say, "We do not know what to believe." Then they will adduce what they have heard against the Church, in opposition to the teaching of the Church. This is not a hopeless class by any means. Patience, perseverance, and compassion, accompanied by lucid teaching, will lead them into the way of truth. Many, who once were disputers, are now firm believers of the truth. 2. Scoffers. There was a class, not the leaders of the schism, that had been led away, to whom warning must be adminstered. To reclaim them terrible earnestness was needed, just as a man plucks the brand from the burning, which he desires to save. The suggestion is that the authority of the truth be used. Not persuasion, but admonition, exhibiting the power of the truth. The scoffer is a man who ridicules tenderness and love, but is a coward before the attacks of the sword of the Spirit. Let him know that there is a God in heaven, and a judgment at whose bar he must soon stand, and his conscience will tremble and make a coward of him. No asperity or bitterness is to be used, but forcibly bring home to him a sense of his guilt by the earnest care for his soul which your manner will manifest. We do not hear of many scoffers converted in our own day, owing to

the loving manner which the Church assumes towards everybody. Let the arrow of conviction have its own barb, and let it fly. 3. The sensualists. They must be approached with fear, or with caution. By these the apostle must mean the false teachers themselves, who preached sodomy, and other forms of immoral practices. Although sunk very deep in sin, they were not to be abandoned; yet, inasmuch as their garment was defiled by sin, they were not to be approached too nearly or too tenderly. They were within the bounds of conviction, although very near the circumference. The lesson for the Church to learn is to approach men according to their condition. Somebody in a hurry gave a tract on the sin of dancing to a man with two wooden legs. We fear that worse mistakes, if possible, are committed frequently. When the Saviour preached to publicans and sinners, His method was simple, and His message loving; but when He preached to the Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees His manner was more dignified, and His message more authoritative.—*W.P.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 24, 25.

God's Work in Souls.—This beautiful *doxology* breathes of the apostolic spirit seen in others. See Rom. xvi. 27; Eph. v. 27; Col. i. 22; and 1 Tim. iii. 3. The additional words, διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν, are not contained in many MSS., although most recent editors have included them in their text. We are inclined to omit them, but not on strong grounds, principally on the ground that their presence in the text does not well agree with the incisive style of this apostle. We have placed σοφῷ in brackets, because internal evidence is against it. We think that σωτῆρ here, as at 1 Tim. ii. 3 and Tit. i. 3, iii. 4, refers to God the Father, and not to Jesus Christ, whose name probably was not in the original, but inserted in the margin, and later incorporated with the text.

I. **Supplication.**—"Now unto Him who is able to guard you from stumbling, and to place you before His glorious presence with exceeding joy." The fervent desire contained in this word starts as if with the consciousness of the presence of the seductive teaching of the false teachers. 1. God is able to guide His people. "He will give His angels charge over thee, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." It is the Spirit that guides into all truth, and prevents stumbling against error. "Lead us not into temptation," is one of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer, because the faithful are liable to commit sin under pressure. "I will guide thee with Mine eye," is a promise to those who walk in the narrow path. 2. God is able to consummate the work of grace. The end will be glorious, because the saints will be perfect. The presentation at court will be made with greeting. The congratulations of heaven will be with "exceeding joy." There are many sources of joy, but redemption will exceed all others in degree and duration. The words of the parable are identical—"Well done, thou good and faithful servant; . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

II. **The ascription.**—"To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and through all the ages." That is, let the God of glory and majesty be revered and praised in time and in eternity. 1. Praise the being of God. He dwells in light, and in Him is no darkness. The effulgence of the Divine presence is "light inaccessible." In creation and redemption there is a reflexion of that glory—"The heavens declare the glory of God," etc. His greatness—majesty—is unsearchable. He is incomprehensible. A sense of His greatness mingles reverence with praise—"My soul doth magnify the Lord." 2. Praise His government. His dominion is from sea to

sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. The idea is that His kingdom is co-extensive with all creation. His power or authority is paramount. Rebellion is temporary; He must rule until all enemies are under His feet. Even the last enemy—death—will be vanquished. The Christian is never without joyous strains when he meditates upon the works of Jehovah. See the concluding paragraph of Ps. ciii.—*W. P.*

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 24. *The Steadying Power of Christ.*—The work that Christ does in souls that are exposed to malign influences, and even to active temptations, is sometimes misconceived, and even misrepresented. It is thought that Christ is with us in the temptation, to guard us from it, to defend us from its evil influence. It is altogether truer, and it is certainly deeper and more searching to say, that Christ is *in us*, the inspiration and the help in our battling with and overcoming the temptation. A doctor may actually deal with a disease which afflicts us; but it is altogether a higher type of doctor who deals with *us*, and so nourishes our vitality that we can successfully throw off the disease. It is something on a slippery day to cling to a friend's arm, and be kept from stumbling. But it is a much greater thing to be made so steady in limb, and so self-controlled in movement, that we can walk the slippery highways without fear. Christ keeps from falling by His grace in us steadying us.

The Aim and Hope of Christ.—"To present you faultless." R.V. "To set you before the presence of His glory without blemish." St. Jude's precise point is usually missed. It is when the continuous sanctifying work of Christ is thought of. It is true that when "sanctified wholly" we may be presented faultless. But St. Jude means that Christ wants to present His people as those who have *not fallen*, under the enticements of the world, the flesh, the devil. Christ makes us clean when we come to Him, and He is willing to give such grace that we may step into heaven clad in unstained garments. His grace is sufficient for *that*; and that is what He wants. Should not that be what we want—that Christ should present us as virgin souls, kept pure, always pure, through His abounding grace?

Moral Purity: what it is, and what it gains.—Notice how we have here the great end to which this upholding leads—"Able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." To Jude, then, that future had three salient points. The great range of mountains, as it were, towered up into three peaks, each of them smitten by the sunlight, and so made visible across the waste. And these three are, after all speculation and revelation, the sum of what we really know about that blessed heaven to which we aspire—"faultless before His presence—with exceeding joy." As to the first, it indicates moral purity. The word is the same as is used to describe the physical perfection of the sacrificial lamb, which was to be "without blemish," and is thence transferred to describe the immaculate holiness of Christ's manhood and of His servants, who are one day to be "holy and without blame before Him in love." The unspotted and unblemished lamb was the type—Christ Himself. So not only may we be kept without stumbling here; but the foulest and the darkest of us, in whose nature sin may seem to be most deeply engrained, may humbly expect to stand in His presence "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing." Here the nature may be one field of

black, broken only by narrow and short streaks of contradictory light; but yonder all the foulness may be discharged from it, and sin lie behind us, an alien power that has nothing in us. That is the first of the mountain summits, up to which the good hand of the Lord our God may lead us, devious and tottering though our steps be there. And the second of them lies by the side of the first, equal in altitude, equal in radiance—"before His presence." If we are to connect that clause directly with the one which precedes it, it is intended to heighten the conception of the purity. If it is without blemish when it is submitted to the searching of that fierce light, it must be unblemished indeed. But if we take the words not to be thus connected, but to present a separate though cognate thought, they present the hope of a complete immersion in, and illumination by, the glorious presence in which we shall walk. Purity is the condition of that. We must be blameless in order to stand in the presence of God. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

THE REVELATION OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE.

INTRODUCTION.

One consideration is persistently kept in view in this Commentary, which is to be regarded as supplemental to Commentaries of the ordinary kind. The author and editor has not been required to discuss theories of interpretation, or even, in any elaborate way, the significance and meaning of symbols, or the fulfilment of prophecy in history. One question alone has to be answered: How can the book of Revelation be used, wisely, skilfully, and suggestively, for *pulpit purposes*. The question of authorship need not be discussed. For the preacher it is enough to say that no name has ever been submitted, and no suggestion of authorship has ever been made, that do not involve far more serious difficulties than are associated with the traditional view. And the chief objections to the Johannine authorship rest upon a very imperfect estimate of John's character, which was at once more intense, and more intensely mystical, than is usually recognised. The supreme interest that both his gospel and his epistles reveal in the personal Christ, and in the living relations of Christ with His people, should satisfy us that he must be the author of the other work, whose supreme subject is the present relation of the living, personal Christ to His Church. John's gospel is the preparation for the book of Revelation.

The date of the book is much disputed, but the trend of modern opinion is decidedly in favour of an early date, before the destruction of Jerusalem, and if that date be accepted, we may gain great help towards the apprehension of the symbols and the historical allusions, by fixing attention upon the unusually alarming, and even mysterious, incidents and circumstances of that particular time. It has not been sufficiently considered that the author clearly expected the things which were represented to him in visions to come to pass *shortly*. He never gives the slightest indication that his eye swept over long centuries of

Christian conflict. In the opening words of the book the Revelation is most distinctly declared to be of "things which will shortly come to pass." And when the entire series of visions is passed, lest there should be any possible misconception, the assurance is renewed in the closing words, "Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for the *time is at hand*." "He which testifieth these things saith, Yea, I come quickly." If we expect to find anticipative Church history in this book, such expressions are inexplicable. If we expect to find principles illustrated in the life and relations of individuals, the Church, and Society, in the Johannine age, which gain illustration in every recurring age, then we satisfy such expressions, and at the same time understand how the book becomes one of age-long interest and helpfulness to Christ's Church.

Dr. Schaff says: "The early date is now accepted by the majority of scholars. In its favour may be urged the allusion to the Temple at Jerusalem (xi. 1 *seqq.*) in language which implies that it yet existed, but would speedily be destroyed; and, further, that the nature and object of the Revelation are best suited by the earlier date, while its historical understanding is greatly facilitated. With the great conflagration at Rome, and the Neronian persecution, fresh in mind, with the horrors of the Jewish war then going on, and in view of the destruction of Jerusalem as an impending fact, John received the visions of the conflicts and final victories of the Christian Church. His book came, therefore, as a comforter to hearts distracted by calamities without a parallel in history."

Warfield notes the chief arguments in favour of the early date, thus: 1. The whole tradition of the Domitian origin of the Apocalypse rests on Irenæus. 2. There is not even an obscure reference in the book to the destruction of Jerusalem as a past event. 3. Jerusalem is, instead, spoken of as still standing, and the Temple as still undestroyed (xi. 1, 2, 3, *seqq.*, and even chap. i. 7, ii. 9, iii. 9, vi. 12, 16). 4. The time of writing is exactly fixed by the description of the then reigning emperor, in xiii. 13, xvii. 7-12. 5. The chief argument with evangelical men, however, is that derived from the literary differences between the Apocalypse and the gospel of John, which are thought by many to be too great to be explained, except on the supposition that a long period of time intervened between the writing of the two books.

Warfield argues against the early date, and so does *Principal David Brown, D.D.*, who says: "Two dates are given: 1. Reign of Nero, about 68 A.D. 2. Reign of Domitian, about 95 or 96. For 1, there is no external evidence; for 2, Irenæus, it is claimed, was speaking from knowledge when he declared that the Revelation was seen not long since, but almost in his generation, near the close of Domitian's reign. Concerning the internal evidence for 1, it may be noted (1) that the use of the term 'Lord's day' as the common term for the first day of the week shows that the book was written long after Nero's reign. (2) The difference between the Greek of this book and of the gospel is explained by the ecstasy of the writer, and by the difference of the subject-matter in the case of the Apocalypse. It is prophetic, full of strange details, Old-Testament phrases. (3) Instead of the Apocalypse being the connecting link between the Synoptists and the fourth gospel, the same truths are expressed in each, and the Apocalypse

has a more developed form of the same truths than the gospel, though, doubtless, the gospels and epistles of John were written later. Is it natural that such lofty developments of truth as the Revelation exhibits should belong to the earliest apostolic age? Note other specific characteristics of the book, arguing for the later date: 1. The conception of the Church as divided into sections—'seven golden candlesticks.' 2. The degenerate state of the Churches. 3. Use of *the Lamb* as a proper name. 4. The phrase, *the books of life*, which is used in a highly developed sense. 5. Other unique and peculiar words and phrases denoting an advanced state of doctrinal conception. All this constrains us to reject the early date."

Probably the key to a satisfactory explanation of the book of Revelation lies in a decision as to its date, and the contents of St. John's field of vision at the earlier or at the later date.

Another question of grave importance concerns the unity of the contents of the book. The modern mania for finding a composite character in all the Bible books has produced a theory of this kind in relation to the book of Revelation. It can best be met and answered by showing how systematic and regular the construction of it is, and that the apparent breaks upon the continuity of the writer's scheme are no marks of distinct authorship, but only indications of an independent individuality. Side-issues are treated in a similar way both by St. Paul in his epistles, and by St. John in his gospel and epistles.

The unity of the book will be seen at once if we set before ourselves its ground-plan. St. John always begins his work by stating his thesis. The beginning both of his gospel, and of his first epistle, is a summary of what the gospel and epistle are written to unfold and illustrate; and precisely in the same way the first three chapters of the book of Revelation present a summary of what the rest of the book unfolds and illustrates. Briefly stated, his thesis is something like this: the glorified and living Christ is actually now with His Church, for the completion of that redemptive work which He has begun. That Church, in its unity of principles, spirit, and experience, can be represented by the seven Churches of Asia. That Church is left in the world, and cannot fail to be influenced, both for good and evil, by surrounding circumstances of distress, persecution, etc. But the living Lord is using all these circumstances for the carrying on of His sanctifying work, making them to be discipline, and even judgment, as need be. Moreover, that same living Lord who is using all the schemes of men, and calamities of nature, for the fulfilling of His purpose in His Church, is also controlling and overruling all these schemes of worldly men and nations. And this double control of the Church and the world must move towards a final issue. What that will be can only now be suggested by symbol, but of these two things we can be absolutely assured: it will be the triumph of Christ and righteousness, and it will involve the infinite glory, purity, and blessedness of Christ's Church.

That being the introductory thesis, it is worked out under the figure of seven seals, which are affixed on the book which contains the record of the various ways in which the living Christ will discipline His Church, and govern and judge

the world in the interests of His Church. The seals are not successive in order of time, nor do they represent anything occurring in order of time. They indicate the seven *kinds of things* that Christ will use for the work He is doing in His Church.

But here we come upon a peculiarity in St. John's treatment of his theme. It reminds us of the construction of the Book of Job. The test of Job, by material loss and by bodily suffering, is briefly and lightly passed over, and the strength of the work is given to the testing of Job by doubts, questions, and false faiths, presented to his *mind*. So in the book of Revelation, the six seals which mainly represent the influence of nature-forces and physical calamities on the Church are lightly dealt with, and the strength of the work is put into the elaboration of the seventh seal, which concerns the more subtle and perilous testings of intellectual and moral evils *within* the Church.

The seventh seal is elaborated under seven trumpets; and the seventh trumpet is elaborated under seven vials and bowls.

When the entire circle of possible earthly influences is completed, and the Church, in one or other of its sections, has been fully subjected to all possible earthly influences that can imperil or discipline it, then the triumph of Christ will have come, and that will prove the glory hour for His Church.

There is one marked peculiarity of the work which has hardly received sufficient attention. There are throughout interposed visions, all of a similar character, being either visions of some from the Church who have gained their triumph, or anticipative worship and praise of the finally triumphant Christ. In these interposed visions are to be found the practical applications of the book. It was written with a most distinct purpose. It was not intended to furnish precise information as to what would come to pass, but to comfort, strengthen, and cheer persecuted, strained, tempted, anxious Christians in what did come to pass. Its message was really this: Whatever happens to you, you will *be safe*. Through whatever happens you will be moving to a final victory; because the living Christ is with you, controlling all, and making all "work together for good."

It must be borne in mind that, from St. John's point of view, there were four classes of persons in his day, and that each class bore distinctive relations to the outward and inward, the physical and moral, evils of the times. Their various liability to influence is indicated in this book, and we have to find which class was dominant in St. John's mind when we seek for the precise reference of particular prophecies. They were: (1) Jews; (2) Jewish Christians; (3) Gentile Christians; (4) Gentiles. How far some of the visions concern the ancient people of God, as distinct from the Christian Church, is a matter of interpretation in which Dr. F. Godet ("Essay on the Apocalypse") may prove a good guide.

It needs only to be remarked that the imagery of the book rests largely upon the prophetic writings of Ezekiel and Daniel, and perhaps, to a greater extent than we can now trace, upon the apocryphal writings or traditions of that day, especially the book of *Enoch*. It is, however, more than possible that some genius in interpretation may arise, who will show that the book of Revelation is really no more than an expansion of the eschatological discourse of our Divine

Lord. From that point of view the reference of the figures and visions to the immediate age of St. John will be more fully indicated, but at the same time the permanent application of the principles illustrated will be more fully recognised. It was, precisely, the book of Divine comfortings for *that age*; it is the book of Divine comfortings for *every age*; for it is the assurance that the living Christ is with His Church, and that the triumph of Christ and His Church is sure, and is coming *to-morrow*.

The Problem of the Apocalypse.

The latest elaborate attempt to solve the problem of the Apocalypse is from the pen of Dr. Daniel Voelter, Professor of Theology at Amsterdam, who has already handled the subject in a work entitled "*Investigations into the Origin of the Apocalypse*" (1st edition, 1882; 2nd edition, 1885). The substance of the new effort is as follows. The growth of the Apocalypse into its present form is ascribed to editorial revision, not to compilation. An apostolic nucleus, or Ur-Apocalypse, was gradually enlarged, until the work attained its present dimensions. This nucleus, the greater part of which is contained in chaps. iv.—ix., is believed to have been composed by the Apostle John, in Palestine, about the year A.D. 62. It was probably, in the first instance, written in Hebrew. Professor Voelter considers the composition of a work in Greek by one of the original apostles extremely improbable. He also rejects the statements of Irenæus concerning the last years of the Apostle John. Additions (found in chaps. x., xi., xvii., xviii., and xix.) were made by an unknown hand in A.D. 68 and A.D. 70. The document was then revised by four successive editors. The first is identified with Cerinthus, the well-known heresiarch, who is represented by Irenæus as the special aversion of John; he wrote under Titus—that is, A.D. 79—81. The activity of the second is put towards the end of the reign of Domitian, or about A.D. 95; that of the third is assigned to the reign of Trajan; and the last, to whom we are said to owe the epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia, is supposed to have written about A.D. 130. In the opinion of Professor Voelter, therefore, six hands can be traced in the Apocalypse as we possess it, and its gradual growth extended over a period of nearly seventy years. This complicated theory is expounded with considerable learning and admirable patience and ingenuity; but in all probability very few will accept it. The author's treatment of a very important tradition is not calculated to win the reader's confidence in his judgment, and he is signally unsuccessful in differentiating the styles of the alleged writers and revisers. He admits that they are all largely dependent on the Old Testament, and that Hebraisms occur in all parts of the book. The opening remark of the preface, that a peculiarly sinister influence seems to dominate apocalyptic research, is well illustrated by this clever but most inconclusive work.—"*The Thinker*."

The book which closes the New Testament "shuts up all" "with a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies," as Milton says, in its stately

music, and may well represent for us, in that perpetual cloud of incense rising up fragrant to the Throne of God and of the Lamb, the unceasing love and thanksgiving which should be man's answer to Christ's love and sacrifice.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

The Practical Purpose of the Apocalypse.

Jewish apocalyptic literature arose from two factors, oppression and the Messianic hope. Pre-Christian apocalypses were a complaint of the persecution of Israel, coupled with an assurance of deliverance by the advent of the Messiah. Christian apocalypses complained of the oppression of the Church by hostile Jews and Romans, with exhortations to courage and hope in view of the destruction which would be visited upon their enemies by the second advent of the Messiah, which was regarded as imminent. The Apocalypse, or Revelation, of John is the noblest example of such Christian writings. The aim of the book was distinctly practical; it was written primarily for its own time, and must have had a powerful effect in promoting Christian courage and hope during the bitter persecutions which the Church then sustained. The book is obscure because it deals with obscure themes,—the programme of the future and Christ's return to judgment. Also because, being strongly political in its bearings, clearness would have been dangerous; it was a proclamation of the curse of heaven on the Roman power. And, lastly, because the language of concealment (which the initiated would be able to interpret correctly) consists of Oriental symbols, largely derived from books like Ezekiel and Daniel, which are necessarily more or less enigmatic to the Western and modern mind. The contents are briefly as follows: chaps. i.—iii. are introductory, containing the messages of the ascended Lord to the seven Churches. Chap. iv. begins the apocalypse proper, which consists in a series of visions. It presents in striking imagery a description of the glory of God, and the homage of the universe to Him. Chap. v. describes the sealed book containing the mysteries of the future, which Jesus only can unlock, and His praise is sung. Chap. vi. records the breaking of six seals, revealing the calamities and judgments which are to come upon those who spurn Christ and persecute His followers. Chap. vii. introduces a pause before the breaking of the last—the seventh—seal, and gives a picture of the host of the redeemed. Chaps. viii., ix., see the seventh seal broken, and there come forth seven angels with trumpets to proclaim the revelation of the final mysteries. Six in turn announce signs and portents of the coming judgment, which will witness Messiah's enemies destroyed, and saints glorified. Chaps. x.—xi. 14, record a pause before the seventh angel's proclamation, and represent the coming joy and sorrow, the overthrow of Jerusalem, the faithful testimony of the Christians, and the cruelty of their foes. Chap. xi. 15-19, the proclamation of the seventh angel. Chaps. xii., xiii., present, under various figures, the opposition of the Roman power to the Church. Chap. xiv. pictures the certain triumph of Christ. Chaps. xv., xvi., record the outpouring of the seven vials of wrath and destruction. Chaps. xvii., xviii., witness the complete overthrow of

the Church's arch-enemy, Rome. Chap. xix. celebrates in angelic chorus the victory of Christ. Chap. xx. 1-10 records the binding and final subjection of Satan. Chap. xx. 11-15, the final judgment. Chaps. xxi., xxii., present the consummation of the Kingdom of God, the culmination of the great drama of conflict and judgment in a scene of eternal peace and joy.—*Prof. G. B. Stevens, D.D.*

St. John was not a prophet in the ancient and vulgar sense; he was not a mere seer of coming events, a mere student and interpreter of the shadows they cast before them; but a wise and holy man, who had a keen and trained insight into the moral laws by which God governs the world, and so heartily believed in these laws as to be quite sure that in the ethical, as in the physical, world, effects spring from causes and correspond to them—that actions are invariably followed by their due consequences and rewards. And, hence, the Apocalypse of St. John is not a series of forecasts, predicting the political weather of the world through the ages of history; it is rather a series of symbols and visions in which the universal principles of the Divine Rule are set forth in forms dear to the heart of a Hebrew Mystic and poet. What is most valuable to us in this book, therefore, is not the letter, the form; not the vials, the seals, the trumpets, over which interpreters, who play the seer rather than the prophet, have been wrangling and perplexing their brains for centuries; but the large general principles which these mystic symbols of Oriental thought are apt to conceal from a Western mind. Whether or not, for example, the vision of an angel flying through heaven to proclaim an impending judgment was taken by St. John's first readers to indicate an approaching event of world-wide moment, is a question of comparatively slight importance to us; it is, indeed, mainly a question of curious antiquarian interest.—*S. Cox, D.D.*

The Descriptive, or Idealist, Theory of the Apocalypse.

In the first three chapters we have the subject of which it is to treat set before us. That subject is the Lord Jesus Christ, not so much in the essential and external glory of His Divine Sonship as in the glory belonging to Him as the Head of His Church. In other words, the subject of the Apocalypse is the Church in Christ, and the object of the book is to present to us a picture of the trials and struggles in the world at the time when, at His Second Coming, her Lord makes His glory manifest, and completes His victory over all her enemies.

It is true that St. John did start from events in his own day; but he beheld in them illustrations of principles which had marked the dealings of God with His people in all past ages of His Church, and which would continue to mark His dealings to the end. That end is constantly before him. It is not reached either in the destruction of Jerusalem, or in any prospect of the overthrow of the Roman power. It comes only with the final manifestation of the Lord, with the final judgment of the wicked, and with the casting of death and Hades into the lake of fire.

Unquestionably it must be admitted that the author wrote from the standpoint of his own age, with its events before his eyes, and with a practical purpose bearing primarily upon it. But that did not hinder him from beholding these events less in themselves than in the eternal principles that underlay them, and came into manifestation through them. Nothing is clearer than that he was the child of his time in a sense in which few writers are. Why should he not also be steeped in the principles which had made the past what it was, and which were to form the future? To think that he was so; to think that he cared more for the ideal than the phenomenal, for the deeper meaning of facts than for the facts themselves, is to put him on a level with the highest, not the lowest, spirits of our race, and with all in whom God has most clearly spoken.

We shall be wrong if we treat the book as predictive, and if we seek in particular events, either of the Church's or the world's history, for the fulfilment of its supposed predictions. The book is mainly occupied with the enunciation of the great principles which guide the action of the Church's Lord, until the time of His return.

Everything contained in the Apocalypse is to be understood symbolically and spiritually. Even did this not appear on the face of the book as a whole, the writer gives us in one case a clear indication of the principle of interpretation he would have us apply. When speaking of the fate of the two witnesses, he says, in ch. xi. 8, "And their dead bodies lie in the streets of the great city, which *spiritually* is called Sodom and Egypt"—words clearly showing that, in this instance at least, we are not to interpret literally. Apart, however, from these particular words, literal interpretation must be admitted by all to be, at least in the main parts of the book, impossible. The only question might be, whether we are to draw any line between the symbolical and the literal, and if so, where and how? No absolute rule can be laid down. The skill and tact of the interpreter can alone guide him. But this much may be said, that where by far the larger portion of the book is symbolical, the probabilities are in favour of the supposition that all is so.

Symbolical language may be a not less definite exponent of human thought than any other form of speech that we employ. The same symbol may be used, and, on the lips of a true teacher, will be used as strictly as any word that literally expresses his idea. The meaning may, in the present instance, be at first more difficult to discover, because in the West, which is so much colder and more phlegmatic than the East, we are accustomed to give much less play to the imagination than is done in regions at once warmer, grander, and more mysterious. But of this we may be assured: that a distinct meaning lies beneath the figures that are employed.

One of the great lessons of the Apocalypse consists in this, that it unfolds such a bright view, not of a world beyond the grave, but of this present world, when we contemplate it with the eye of faith, and penetrate through the veil of sense to the great springs of spiritual action by which it is really moved. It may be doubted if in this respect there is one single picture of the Apocalypse applicable only to the future inheritance of the saints. What is set forth in its apparent

visions of future happiness is rather the present privilege of believers, when they look at what they possess in the light of that Christian revelation in which old things pass away, and all things are made new. If we enter upon the study of it with this feeling—and it is a feeling which, as the spirituality of the Church increases, will more and more commend itself to the Christian mind—the visions of this book will be to us what they were to the apostle who first beheld them. They will give us fellowship on the loneliest rock of the wide ocean of life, and they will lighten the darkest spots of earth with a heavenly and unchanging glory.—*W. Milligan, D.D.*

Opposition to the Descriptive Theory.

There are two possible theories, the historical and the descriptive. The descriptive theory is that which sees in the book only the symbolical representation of great ideas and principles; proclamations of eternal truth in general terms. Against this it is urged; 1.—The mere expression of general principles of the Divine government hardly affords a sufficient motive for so complicated and difficult a book. These ideas are plainer than the book written to enforce them. 2. The theory is not self-consistent, for it admits that there may be some predictive or historical element in the book. And if any of this element is to be admitted—and it is difficult to see how it can be shut out—then this scheme of interpretation fails to satisfy the demand which the book itself makes. 3. This book ranks with Daniel, and the two books stand or fall together. Both are what are called apocalyptic, and are more than mere prophecy. What may be asserted of prophecy cannot be in all respects true of them. While we have no right to class these two books with that heap of writings which are usually denominated "apocalyptic," yet it must be granted that such a method of interpretation as the "descriptive" is out of keeping with them, as having characteristics similar, though in a higher degree, to those other writings. The purely historical theory sees in the book only closely related events which it needed no predictive power to discover.—*Principal David Brown, D.D.*

CHAPTER I.

THE REVELATION OF THE LIVING CHRIST.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

r. 1. **The revelation of Jesus Christ.**—This may mean, "belonging to, or proceeding from, Jesus Christ," or it may be the revelation concerning Jesus Christ; *i.e.*, the partial unfolding of what He, as the living one, is doing, and will do, with His Church in the world. The mystery which has to be unfolded is this: for what purpose is the redeemed Church left in the world, and made subject to the varied influences of calamities, national changes, persecutions, and temptations? The revelation of the mystery is the present relation in which Jesus Christ is standing to His Church, and the purpose concerning it which He is outworking, and for which He is using these various, and apparently strange, instrumentalities. **God gave unto him.**—*I.e.*, God permitted him to reveal so much as is in his book for the comfort and encouragement of the Church. The full mystery must ever be hid in God; but revelations may be made to men within limitations which the Divine wisdom provides. Under the Old-Testament economy, faithful souls were helped and cheered by partial disclosures of the Divine plans and purposes, through the agencies of the prophets; and in the New-Testament economy the discourses concerning the last things given by our Lord, the prophecies of St. Paul and St. Peter, and the Apocalypse of St. John, are analogous to the work of the older prophets. **Shortly.**—There can be no doubt that the apostle's mind was full of the coming events of his own time, but these events are properly regarded as typical of the events which recur in every age, and are used by the Living Christ for the discipline of His Church. **By His angel.**—The visible agent in the Divine communication (chap. x .8, xvii. 7, xxii. 8, etc.). **John.**—The reason for calling himself "servant" rather than "apostle" does not appear; but that the author of the work is the beloved apostle seems to be beyond reasonable doubt. He is the apostle of Christ's higher nature and living relations.

Ver. 2. **Bare record.**—Or had already borne record. The expression seems to refer to St. John's earlier work of teaching, if not to the gospel and epistles he had written. (Some regard the Apocalypse as his first work.) **Prophecy.**—A term used in the sense of "disclosure," as well as "foretelling." A prophecy may *reveal a meaning*; the time element is not essential to it. "Any declaration of the principles of the Divine government, with indications of their exemplification in coming history, is a prophecy. The prophecy gives us the rule, with some typical application illustrative of its method of working; after history affords us the working out of various examples."

Ver. 4. **Churches.**—Or congregations. **Asia.**—The single province, not the whole Asia Minor. It may have been the province in which St. John had chiefly laboured. The Seven Churches are taken as types of the varieties in the churches which make up together the *one* Church. Seven is the perfect number. **Him which is,** etc.—God Himself. Note how jealously apostles guard against the possibility of being so interested in Christ as to lose the sense of God. Christ Himself never would come between souls and God, and He will not now. **Seven spirits.**—Or the one spirit, with differing manifestations. The Holy Ghost must be meant. It is difficult, however, to see why He should be represented as *before the throne.* Possibly the allusion is to the attendants about God's throne who reverently agree in what God does.

Ver. 5. **Jesus Christ.**—This combines His human name, "Jesus," and His human office, "Christ," *i.e.*, Messiah. St. John is the apostle of the veritable humanity. **Faithful Witness.**—Alluding to the teaching work of His human life. **First begotten.**—R.V. *first-born*, which conveys the idea of the text. Christ was the first person born into that spiritual, eternal life, into which we must be born. **Prince,** etc.—True ruler of mankind, because King in the spiritual sphere, which must necessarily control the material. *Bishop Carpenter* well says: "The disposition to dwell on the future and more visibly recognised reign of Christ hereafter has tended to obscure the truth of His present reign. He *is* the real King of kings." **Washed**

us . . . blood.—Clearly a strong figure. Taken literally it carries no meaning, for nothing ever is, or can be, washed in blood. It will appear again and again in this book, and, indeed, elsewhere in the New Testament, that Christ's "blood" stands as a figure for the strenuousness of His endeavour in carrying out His redemptive mission, which mission is figured as "washing us from our sins." The sentence giving the key to the use of the term is this: "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin" (Heb. xii. 4).

Ver. 6. **Kings and priests.**—R.V. "to *be a* kingdom, *to be* priests"; see 1 Peter ii. 5. The service which Christ's redeemed and cleansed ones are called to render is partly represented by the service of a *king*, and partly by the service of a *priest*.

Ver. 7. **With clouds.**—Mark xiv. 62. Either as with a glory which must be tempered by clouds, or magnificently surrounded with clouds, or set against a background of clouds, so as to stand out most impressively. There is also the idea that, being in the sky, all eyes can be turned up to Him. But we should clearly see that Christ's coming is *figured*, not *described*; indeed, it cannot be described in human language. **Pierced.**—John xix. 34. Type of those who pierced Christ, in a spiritual sense, in every age.

Ver. 8. **Alpha and Omega.**—First and last letters of the Greek alphabet, regarded as including all the letters between. So Christ bears relation to the whole story of humanity, from its beginning to its close. Recalling ver. 4, we incline to refer this verse to *God* rather than to Jesus. R.V. has, "saith the Lord God."

Ver. 9. **Companion.**—As having a full share in the experience of those who confess and serve Christ. **Tribulation.**—The work of the threshing roller (*tribulum*). The troubles and persecutions of Christ's Church were, in the control of Christ, separating the chaff from the wheat. **Kingdom.**—Or recognised present rule of the Living Christ. **Patience.**—Or effort to bear, endure, and wait, which is becoming to those who know that Jesus lives. **Patmos.**—A barren island, now Palmosa, used by some Roman emperors as a place of banishment. No historic record of St. John's exile has been found.

Ver. 10. **In the Spirit.**—This means in a rapt, contemplative, absorbed state of mind; but such a state of mind may well be thought of as wrought by the indwelling Holy Ghost. It is the mood of mind which prepares us for spiritual visions. **Lord's day.**—An important statement. What put St. John into this rapt condition was his meditation on the mystery and glory of his Divine Lord, as the *Risen* and *Living* One. **Great voice.**—Thinking about Christ, he suddenly seemed to hear Him, and then even to see Him, in marvellous symbolic form.

Ver. 11. For the Churches mentioned see notes on each epistle.

Ver. 12. **See the voice.**—"See Him whose voice I heard." **Seven golden candlesticks.**—Compare Zech. iv. 2-11. Lamp-stands would be a better term. Not one candlestick with seven branches, but seven candlesticks. The independence of the *Churches* of Christ is consistent with the unity of the *Church* of Christ.

Ver. 13. **Midst.**—Middle, centre. **Like unto.**—So as to be immediately and distinctly recognised. "Son of Man" was Christ's own name for Himself. It is used here because His glory might hide from view His oneness of sympathy with His people. **Down to the foot.**—Compare the long garments of priests. **Girdle.**—Put round the breasts as a sign of kingly repose, not round the loins, which would be a sign of toil. Christ is, as head of His people, the great Priest, and the great King. These—the garment and girdle—suggest His offices. Now we see His personal character and His power for fulfilling His offices. Each figure suggests absolute purity, in which lies perfect power.

Ver. 14. **White.**—Compare scene at our Lord's transfiguration. **Flame of fire.**—Which is white when it is full and strong.

Ver. 15. **Brass.**—Which glows with whiteness in the furnace. **Many waters.**—Flowing down hill-sides, white with foam, the very sound of them in harmony with whiteness.

Ver. 16. **Seven stars.**—See ver. 20. In His light these glow with whiteness. **Two-edged sword.**—Gleaming white. **Sun.**—So white no eye can gaze upon it. By all these figures the lustre of holiness and righteousness is signified.

Ver. 17. **As dead.**—Compare Job xlii. 5, 6; Isa. vi. 5. The realisation of the Divine presence, even in symbol, is profoundly humbling to the devout man.

Ver. 18. **I am alive**, etc.—In this sentence is the key-note of the book. **Hell and death.**—Figures of all the forms of woe that can affect the Church. They are in the absolute control of the Living One, and are used by Him for His purposes.

Ver. 20. **Angels.**—Either the ministers, or the guardian angels, of the Churches. It is, however, quite possible that they represent the angels appointed to conduct the discipline of each Church. Then what is asserted is, that the angel of discipline for each Church is absolutely held in the Living Christ's hands, and does but work out His purpose of grace.

Note on the "Seven Spirits" by Moses Stuart.—After dismissing the suggestions that either God, or the Holy Spirit, can be meant by this figurative expression, Stuart argues in favour

of a third possible meaning—that of attending or ministering presence-angels. Among the ancient fathers not a few embraced this view; such as Clemens Alex. Andreas of Cæsarea, and others. So among the moderns, Valla, Beza, Drusius, Hammond, and many others. 1. The nature of the whole expression favours this view. The seven spirits *before His throne* naturally means those who stand in His presence, waiting His commands in the attitude of ministering servants; see and compare Rev. iv. 5, vii. 9, 15, viii. 2, xi. 4, 16, xii. 10, xiv. 3, xx. 12—which passages, although not all of the same tenor with the text before us, still decide that those who are *before* the throne are different from those *on* the throne. 2. Several passages in the Revelation go directly to confirm the opinion in question. *E.g.*, Apoc. viii. 2, "I saw τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλους, who stand before God." This is the first mention of these seven angels which occurs after the introduction to the book. The article τούς of course designates here the *well-known* seven angels, *i.e.* archangels, or presence-angels, which the reader was expected readily to recognise. Such a meaning is unavoidable, under such circumstances. Here also, I cannot doubt, is to be ranked the passage in Rev. iv. 5, where the seven lamps burning before the throne are said to be τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ Θεοῦ, *i.e.* the seven spirits. All the passages cited serve to show that the "seven angels" was a familiar idea with the writer; and that, in this respect, he only followed the common *usus loquendi* of his time. The book of *Tobit* introduces Raphael as saying, "I am . . . one of the seven angels." The book of *Enoch* gives the names of the seven angels who watch. The word "watchers" is employed in the Syriac liturgies for guardian angels, or archangels. We find seven Amshaspends, or archangels, in the theosophy of Zoroaster.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—3.

The Mission of Prophecy.—We are familiar with the fact that God never brings judgments on either nations, families, or individuals, without giving them previous warnings, and opportunities of repentance. It is equally certain, though by no means so fully recognised, that God does not give rewards and blessings to His faithful servants without first cheering them with promises and prophecies. Hope is a most inspiring and ennobling grace, and in every age God has held before His people something to hope for. The assurance and prophecies of Old-Testament Scripture were the cheer of God's saints through long periods of depression and anxiety. For them the curtain of the future was lifted, and they saw something of the good time coming. As we apprehend the conditions of the Christian Churches, and especially the Gentile Churches, in the days of St. John, we can recognise the grace shown in thus sending them this revelation of things that "must shortly come to pass." The commotions of that age might well seem overwhelming. The persecutions imperilled the Church's life. What could bring cheer to fainting hearts like this assurance that the Living Lord was working amid it all in behalf of His Church? and this prophecy that, out of all the conflict, and the stress, the Church would come purified and perfected, a bride fit for the Sinless One?

I. **Prophecy dispels all idea of chance as ruling the world.**—It does not matter whether by chance is meant a series of accidents, or the outworking of fixed laws—prophecy, as a forthtelling and foretelling of things to come, makes it impossible to believe in chance, or mere law. There must be intelligence—and an intelligent One—discerning the future, and making it a moral power in the present. One verified prophecy would witness for the being of God.

II. **Prophecy delivers from all fear of the schemes of men.**—If we could only look *down*, we should only see what men were doing. Those early Christians might easily become hopelessly distressed as they watched the schemes of men in their day. Prophecy delivered them, by making them look *on*, and see how vain men's schemes would prove, and how certainly God was making the very wrath of men praise Him. The future, unfolded before them, showed plainly that God knew "how to deliver the godly out of (men's) persecution."

III. **Prophecy occupies the thought and heart of men with comforting considerations.**—The best relief from the strain of what *is*, may be found in meditating on what *shall be*. We must live in our *to-day* for the doing of our

duty. We may live in God's *to-morrow* for the comfort and good cheer of our souls. There are lessons to be learned from the past. There are fears to be felt in the present. But there are hopes to cheer us in the pictures of the future God graciously gives. It is not healthy to dwell on the future as a mere storehouse of good things which we are going to enjoy; but it is healthy to dwell on the future as the time of the full and manifested triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ. And *that* is the prophecy of this book.

IV. **Prophecy of what is to be acts as a persuasion to men to seek what must be now, if they are to share the good prophesied.**—See ver. 3. All God's good things are ours—only on conditions; and those conditions are to be met now, in our present relations. There are endurances of present tribulation; steadfastnesses under present strain, witnesses amid present opposition; maintenances of loyalty, even at cost of suffering; and personal purities to keep while surrounded with defiling Paganism; and the prophecy of what *is to be* inspires to persistent endeavour. The prophecy that says we shall walk with Christ in white is a present incentive to getting white and keeping white. The revelation given to the Church through St. John is really a prophecy, and intended to have on the early Christians the usual moral power belonging to all Divine prophecies.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 1. *Revelation of Christ in the Church.*—The action of Christ is seen throughout the book. It is Christ who bids John write to the Seven Churches; it is Christ who opens the Seven Seals (chap. vi. 1); who reveals the sufferings of the Church (chap. vi. 9); who offers the prayers of the saints (chap. viii. 3); and delivers the little book to John (chap. x. 1-11). Thus it is seen that, though the rise and fall of earth's history is included in the revelation, it is a revelation also of a living person. It is not the dull, dead, onward flow of circumstances, but the lives of men and nations seen in the light of Him who is the light of every man, and the life of all history; and thus we learn that "only a living person can be the Alpha and Omega, the starting point of creation and its final rest." The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of this prophecy as of all others.—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

The Christian Hope.—From the beginning of its history, humanity has lived in a state of expectation, of disquieting fears, and of glorious hopes. "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head"—this prophecy contains already an indication of the formidable struggles which are impending, and of the assured final victory. This expectation concentrated and purified itself in the heart of the people of Israel, which was ever attracted towards the future, and whose fervent aspirations were met on their upward way towards heaven by the prophecy which was descending from thence to meet it. Through Jesus this Divine aspiration became that of the Church; and the book of the Apocalypse is the precious vessel in which this treasure of Christian hope has been deposited for all ages of the Church, but especially for the Church *under the Cross.*—*F. Godet, D.D.*

For the life of St. John, see Introduction to his epistles.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 4—7.

A Salutation, a Doxology, and a Prophecy.—It is important to notice distinctly to whom this book of Revelation is addressed. It is neither sent to the world in general, nor meant for the world in general; and it takes a point of view which makes it wholly incomprehensible to the world in general. It is altogether

a mistake for men who have not the special illumination of the Holy Spirit, which belongs exclusively to the new, Divine life in men, to seek in the book of Revelation for any events or details of human history. The book is prepared for, and addressed exclusively to, the regenerate persons who are in the fellowship of seven particular Christian Churches, but to these Churches as representing the whole Church of Jesus Christ in that age, and so to the whole Church of Jesus Christ in every age. The book of Revelation is, strictly and exclusively, a *Christian's* book. It is no disclosure of the progress of human history, even to him; it is the assurance—which is a most gracious and inspiring assurance to him—that the Living Lord Jesus is ruling, controlling, and using all the movements of men, all the calamities of nature, and even all the ills and evils brought in by men's bad passions, for His purposes in the disciplining and perfecting of His Church. It is the book of Revelation of Christ's triumph over all material and all human evils, in the interest of His Church. Keeping this in mind will greatly help our understanding of the book, which may properly be called "Christ in History for His Church's sake."

I. **The salutation.**—"Grace and peace" are familiar to us as the Old Hebrew salutation, "Peace be unto you!"—instinct with the new Christian feeling which recognises *peace* to be dependent on *grace*. What is peculiar in this salutation is the threefold source from which St. John expects the grace and peace to come. 1. From God, the Being who is thought of as outside of and independent of time. "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God." This thought of God must be seen in precise relation to the contents of the book. Such are the commotions and the woes of the human story, that men might easily be so unduly oppressed by them as to fear that they were even beyond God's control. So St. John starts with such an assertion concerning God as involves His absolute superiority—beyondness. All the earth-story is but a day in His eternal years. The conflicts of earth are to Him but as a play fight of children to a father. He holds it all in control, and can give peace in the power of His grace. 2. From the representatives of the Church. "The seven Spirits which are before the throne" (see "Critical Notes"; and Special Note from Moses Stuart). It would be unnatural to bring in the Holy Ghost here, because of the attitude; because of the unnatural description,—"seven Spirits"—and because St. John does not usually deal with the work of the Spirit. He is the apostle of the *Person* of Christ, human, and glorified. God is thought of under figure of an Eastern king, seated on His throne, surrounded by His courtiers, who cheerfully echo His wishes, and join in wishing for the Church on earth "peace through grace." 3. From the Son of God, as the mediatorial agent for administering God's *grace* to His Church, and so bringing to it *peace*. Christ is presented in a threefold form, as Witness, New-Born, and Prince. This description must be seen in relation to the contents of the book, and then we see Christ as the Witness for God who prepares the Church for what is coming; as the first to possess that new spiritual life which is to be subjected to the strain of all these earthly associations; and as the Prince—Immanuel commissioned by Shaddai—to do the actual ruling and over-ruling of everything in the interests of the Church.

II. **The doxology.**—Vers. 5, 6. This is dealt with fully in one of the Outlines. We only notice here that praise is offered for (1) Christ's self-sacrificing love; (2) for the cleansing which that self-sacrificing love effects; and (3) for the honour which Christ brings for those whom He has cleansed. Two things are desired for Christ; present honour—that honour and glory which come from full trust and loyal service; and final triumph, the hastening of the day when everything shall be put under His feet. The doxologies grow in strength in this book. Here twofold; in chap. iv. 9-11, threefold; in chap. v. 13, fourfold; in chap. vii. 12, sevenfold.

III. **From prophecy.**—Ver. 7. The explanation of this verse depends on our regarding it as indicating what Christ's coming will be to the Church, or to the world. Probably St. John is briefly declaring what it will be to all who have not been cleansed by Christ from their sins. To Christians, Christ is presented as the Living One, who has come, who is here, and who is now working for them amid world-scenes. But what is Christ to the world? Only the coming One who comes for judgment. The picture of the coming fixes attention on the manifestation of Christ in the majesty and terror of surrounding clouds. Then it bids us see the upturned eyes, and hear the hopeless wail, of unrepentant humanity. For the Saviour of moral beings must become their Judge when His saving grace toward them has been finally despised and refused. Christ coming to a world of sinners can but be an appalling revelation to them. Seeing Him, they will know what they have lost, and what they have to fear. In the righteous dealings of God the good man cannot fail to coincide. "Even so, Amen." But this must in no way be represented as gloating over the woes of the lost. What is right for God to do, is right for God's servants to approve. And "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Note on ver. 4. "*Seven Spirits*"; so chap. iii. 1, iv. 5, v. 6. In the second of these passages it would be possible to understand the names of seven chief angels (see chap. viii. 2); but here it would scarcely seem possible that creatures should be, not merely coupled with the Creator as sources of blessing, but actually thrust into the midst of His being, between the two Divine Persons. "The seven Spirits," thus made co-ordinate with the Father and the Son, can scarcely be other than the Holy Ghost, who is known to us in His sevenfold operations and gifts, and who, perhaps, has some sevenfold character in Himself which we cannot and need not understand, but of which there seem to be intimations in the passages of this book referred to, and in Zech. iii. 9, iv. 10, by which these are certainly to be illustrated.—*W. H. Simcox. M.A.*

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 4. *The Number Seven.*—It may not be inappropriate to note that Philo speaks of the number seven in its mystical import as identical with unity, as unity developed in diversity, and yet remaining one. The after-recurrence in this book of the number seven is selected to support the thought of completeness and variety; the dramatic unity is preserved, though the scenes which are unfolded are amply diversified; and the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven vials, are not three successive periods, but three aspects of one complete period, presided over by that one Spirit whose guidance may be seen in all ages and in diverse ways.—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

Seven Spirits.—There are three possible explanations of this term which claim our careful consideration. (1) It may mean God, regarded as a most perfect Spirit; (2) it may mean the Holy Spirit, endowed with a most perfect nature; or (3) it may mean the seven archangels, or presence-angels, who stand near the throne of God, and are (so to speak) prime ministers in the execution of His will.

The Seven Spirits.—No one who has studied the mystic use of the number "seven" will wonder to find the infinitude of the power and the glories of the Holy Ghost expressed in the language, "the seven Spirits." The Holy Ghost is described as "before the throne," to convey, with the idea of equality, His continual procession from the Father and from the Son. There is another reason why the Holy Ghost

is called "the Seven Spirits"—in that sevenfold action by which He works upon the soul of a man.

I. **The office of reproving or convincing.**—"He shall reprove the world of sin." To show us what we are, to make us feel sin, is the Spirit's first work.

II. **The showing of Christ.**—"He convinces of righteousness." There is no other power that ever can, or will, reveal the Saviour to a sinner's soul.

III. **The Holy Ghost comforts.**—All the Spirit's comfortings have to do with Jesus Christ. He never uses the commonplaces of man's consolation. He makes Christ fill the empty place, and exhibits the loveliness of Christ's person, and the sufficiency of Christ's work.

IV. **The Holy Ghost teaches.**—He admits the believer into those deeper hidden meanings which lie buried under the surface of the Word. He assists the memory and makes it retentive of holy things. There are none who teach like this Teacher, because He knows all things—not the lesson only, but the learner also.

V. **The Holy Ghost sanctifies.**—He prompts every good desire and right thought. He gives the taste for spiritual things, and prepares the timid for the occupations and enjoyments of a higher world.

VI. **The Holy Ghost intercedes.**—Not as Christ, who carries on His work without us and prays for us in heaven; but He inwardly, throwing Himself into the soul, prays. All true prayer in a man is the prayer of the Holy Spirit.

VII. **The Holy Ghost seals the soul.**—He lays on the believer that stamp with the name and the image of God which every power in earth, or in heaven, or in hell, shall recognise. This is "the seven Spirits which are before the throne." I thank God the "seven" are one and the one is "seven." Where He fulfils one of His blessed offices, there, sooner or later, He will assuredly fulfil them all.—*James Vaughan, M.A.*

Vers. 4, 5. *The Gifts of Christ as Witness, Risen, and Crowned.*—So loftily did John, in his old age, come to think of his Lord. The words of the text are not only remarkable in themselves, and in the order in which they give these three aspects of our Lord's character, but remarkable also in that they occur in an invocation in which the apostle is calling down blessings from heaven on the heads of his brethren.

I. **How do "grace and peace" come to us from the "Faithful Witness"?**—"Witness" is one of St. John's most familiar words. He received it from Christ Himself, who claimed to be, in an eminent and special sense, the Witness to the world. Witness of what? Mainly about God. All our highest, and purest, and best knowledge of God comes from the life, and conduct, and character, of Jesus Christ. The name "Witness" indicates the characteristic and remarkable *manner* of our Lord's testimony. The task of a witness is to affirm; and our Lord makes His words stand on their own evidence, or, rather, depend upon His veracity. The name bears, too, on the *ground* of His testimony. A faithful witness is an eye-witness. That Christ claims to be in His witness concerning God. Is there not, then, grace and peace brought to us all from that faithful Witness and from His credible testimony?

II. **We have grace and peace from the Conqueror of death.**—He is the "first-*born* from the dead," the resurrection being looked upon as a kind of birth into a higher order of life. 1. The resurrection of Christ is the confirmation of His testimony. In it He is "declared to be the Son of God." All the truth, and peace, and grace, and hope, which flow to us from the witness of Jesus Christ to the Father are neutralised and destroyed unless we believe in the resurrection from the dead. His words may still remain gracious and true in a measure, only all dashed with the terrible mistake that He asserted that He would rise

again, and rose not. Strike away the resurrection, and you fatally damage the witness of Jesus. You cannot strike the supernatural out of Christianity and keep the natural. Moreover, faith in the resurrection gives us a living Lord to confide in. And in Him, and in His resurrection-life, we are armed for victory over that foe whom He has conquered.

III. **We have grace and peace from the King of kings.**—The series of aspects of Christ's work here is ranged in order of time, in so far as the second follows the first and the third flows from both; though we are not to suppose that our Lord has ceased to be the Faithful Witness when He has ascended His sovereign throne. 1. He is "Prince of the kings of the earth" just because He is "the Faithful Witness." That is to say, His dominion is the dominion of the truth; His dominion is a kingdom over men's wills and spirits: such rule rests upon His witness. 2. He is "Prince of the kings of the earth" because in that witness He dies, and so becomes a "martyr" to the truth. His dominion rests on love and sacrifice. He is the King because He is the Sacrifice. 3. Because He has risen again. His resurrection has been the step mid-way, as it were, between the humiliation of earth and death, and the loftiness of the Throne. By it He has climbed to His place at the right hand of God. He is King and Prince, then, by right of truth, love, sacrifice, death, resurrection. And King to what end? That He may send grace and peace. Is there no peace for a man's heart in feeling that the Brother that loves him and died for him rules over all the perplexities of life, the confusions of providence, the sorrows of a world, and the corruptions of his own nature? Is it not enough to drive away fears, to anodyne cares, to disentangle perplexities, to quiet disturbances, to make the coward brave, and the feeble strong, and the foolish wise, and the querulous patient, to think that Christ is King, and that the Hands which were nailed to the cross wield the sceptre, and that He who died for me rules the universe, and rules me?—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

Vers. 4-6. *The Song of the Forgiven.*—Not every gift calls forth a song; but this gift of forgiveness is worthy of, and has obtained, one.

I. **This gift of pardon is necessary for the Church.**

II. **It was purchased at a great cost.**

III. **Love prompted its bestowment.**

IV. **It is bestowed freely.**

V. **Like all the benefactions of love, it is bestowed promptly.**

VI. **It is all-inclusive.**

VII. **It brings with it all other blessings.**—*R. A. Bertram.*

Ver. 5. *Christ's Present Love and its Great Act.*—R.V. "Unto Him that loveth us, and looseth us from our sins by His blood."

I. **The ever-present, timeless love of Jesus Christ.**—St. John wrote nearly half a century after Jesus Christ was buried, and he proclaims, not a past love, not a Christ that lived long ago, but a Christ that lives now; and he speaks as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." This is unintelligible, unless we believe Christ to be Divine. He loves us with an everlasting love, because He is God manifest in the flesh. The Divine nature of the Lord Jesus Christ is woven through the whole of the book of Revelation, like a golden thread. Christ's love, then, is (1) unaffected by time, for it is the love of One who is Divine. As of all His nature, so of all His love, we may be sure that time cannot bound it. And it is (2) not disturbed or absorbed by multitudes. He loveth *us*. It is (3) unexhausted by exercise, pouring itself ever out, and ever full notwithstanding. It is (4) a love unchilled by the sovereignty and glory of His exaltation. There is a wonderful difference between the Christ of the gospels and the Christ of the Revelation. But the nature behind the differing circumstances is the same.

II. **The great act in time which is the outcome and proof of this endless love.**—"He looseth us." The metaphor is that of bondage. We are held and bound by the chains of our sins. Christ looses them by "His blood." The death of Christ has power to deliver us from the guilt and penalty of sin. His blood looses the fetters of our sins, inasmuch as His death, touching our hearts, and also bringing to us new powers through the Spirit, frees us from the power of sin, and brings into operation new powers and motives, which deliver us from our ancient slavery.

III. **The praise which should be our answer to this great love.**—Irrepressible gratitude bursts into a doxology from St. John's lips as he thinks of the love of Christ, and all through the Apocalypse we hear the shout of praise from earth or heaven.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

Vers. 5, 6. *A Suggestive Doxology.*—This is a doxology—a sudden outburst of praise. There are many such in Scripture, and they show that religion is a matter of emotion, and not of intellect only. St. John, in his vision of the redeemed world, saw that the mention of Christ's name woke the heavenly song, and set the angels and the redeemed singing together His praise. In the doxology now before us, though we seem to have no more than St. John's human feeling, we have in reality the praise of the rapt and entranced man, who seems to himself to be actually taking a place among the redeemed hosts, and only giving an earthly form and voice to the utterance of their heavenly song. The doxologies in which the redeemed Church takes part grow in fulness in the early chapters of this book of Revelation. In our text the doxology ascribes "glory and dominion." The four and twenty elders ascribe "glory and honour and power." All creation ascribe "blessing, and honour, and glory, and power." And the angels, and the elders, and the four beasts, solemnly bow before the throne, offering a sevenfold, perfect adoration, and saying, "Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen." We have, in the text, the threefold marvel for which we should be ever praising Christ now, in our measure, as for this same threefold marvel the redeemed praise Him in the glory.

I. **The first marvel is, that He should love us.**—"Unto Him that loved us." St. John dwells on this as if it were a most surprising thing. It is characteristic of dependent and affectionate natures that they cannot understand why it is that they have become objects of love. No one dwells on the mystery of God's love to sinful men as St. John does. His pleased, satisfied feeling, which so often finds expression, kept the beloved disciple in right relations with his Saviour. It made him feel every day in a clinging, humble, thankful mood. And that is the kind of mood we all need to win. It is a marvel indeed that Christ should love us. If we were lovable we might feel no surprise. But what are we to His all-searching view? Who but the Father could see anything attractive in the prodigal. In view of the actual tone and temper of our daily life, is it really a surprise to us that Christ should keep His arms of everlasting love continually about us?

II. **The second marvel is, that Christ should "wash us from our sins in His own blood."**—The cleansing power of the blood of Christ was one of this apostle's most cherished ideas. The words of Jesus on the supper night, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me," gave St. John a key-thought, which unlocked for him the mystery of the risen Christ's continuous work, and explained the relation in which the redeemed ones must ever stand to Christ. That company of white-robed saints in heaven, is not a company of sinners, all of a sudden washed and cleansed. It is made up of sanctified sinners, whose Christian sins have been washed away by Christ,

through the gracious agency of earthly tribulations. The figure of washing is a somewhat difficult one for us to apprehend, because one side—another side—of our Redeemer's work, His justifying work, His work of setting us in a right standing with God, has been almost unduly pressed on attention. We may be helped by observing that washing is not so much an *act* as a *process*, and that it bears relation to stains on the garments, and foulness on the person. It is a prolonged business to get the foulness off, and the stains out; and several processes, and often severe ones, have to be gone through. Christ's washing is to be distinguished from His forgiving and His justifying. "Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified." Justified, or set in a right standing before God. Washed, or cleansed from the defilements left from the old-time of sin and self-will. Sanctified, or positively endowed, clothed upon, with the beautiful and pure spirit of Christ. We can readily see how those who had been brought over from the defilements and moral corruptions of heathenism would deeply feel the marvel of Divine grace, shown in washing them from their sins. That they would be able to get fully rid of the relics of immorality and foulness, left from their old heathen life, must have seemed to them impossible; and so, for them to be actually clean at last, and dressed in the symbolic white robes, was to them the marvel of marvels. This much is easy in explanation of the figure; but what did the apostle mean by washing "in His own blood." We do not wash things in blood. Even in Judaism, there was sprinkling with blood, but, in our sense of washing, neither garments, nor persons, nor sacrifices, were ever washed in blood. Perhaps this was the apostle's meaning: Christ's blood, as referring to His earthly work, stands for His sufferings, borne in carrying out His life-mission as man's Redeemer—sufferings which were consummated in His offering Himself unto blood-shedding and death. And so Christ's blood, figuratively used by St. John concerning His present work in the "heavenlies," stands for His present efforts and suffering anxieties—up, as it were, to measures of blood—borne in carrying out the heavenly mission of sanctifying that is now entrusted to Him. Christ's blood, when it is applied to His human history, stands as a figure for His strenuous earnestness, and sacrificing endeavours as a human Saviour. Christ's blood, if it is applied to His present continuing life in heaven, stands as a figure for the strenuous earnestness, and sacrificing endeavours of His heavenly life, as our Intercessor, High Priest, and Mediator. We are "washed in the blood of the Lamb," then, means this: We are actually now being cleansed from our pollutions, our corruptions, our evil inclinations, our easily besetting sins, by the present gracious working of the Living Saviour, who still works in us, even as He did on earth for His disciples, up to such measures as can only be represented by the shedding of His blood. "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin;" but Christ, our Lord, has so resisted, and is so resisting every day. He rolls over us, back and fro, His own great *tribulum*, the threshing roller of testings and sufferings, parting the chaff from the wheat. But have we watched Him at the rolling? Have we seen that the rolling is hard work to Him—straining work for Him? In His supreme concern for our washing and cleansing, He brings right over us, body and soul, the great threshing roller of tribulation, and will sacrifice Himself up to measures of blood, if He can but cleanse us from all sin, and make us pure grain, free and faultless. It is the marvel of marvels—Christ, the infinite Cleanser, is actually at work in our lives to-day; and the work is so hard that it even costs Him groans, and tears, and blood.

III. **The third marvel is, that He should make us "kings and priests unto God."**—The symbol of the washing naturally leads on to the symbol of

consecration. God does not merely turn citizens and subjects into kings, and common people into priests. That would be a very little thing to count a marvel of grace. In the old Jewish thought, kings and priests were God's "anointed ones"—anointed to some special service, as Aaron and David. And it is in just this concerning themselves that redeemed souls rejoice. They are, in the higher sense, king's and priests, consecrated to God's service, altogether set apart as His, having every power and faculty absorbed in His work. Will not that be a marvel for us, who have been so long busied with our own things—so busied that we could scarcely find even corners of our time and life for the things of God? At last we shall be wholly Christ's, to serve Him day and night in His temple. We shall be kings and priests unto God, and in that find an all-satisfying heaven.

Ver. 7. *The Hope of God's Church in all the Ages.*—Sometimes we dwell on the hope of the Old-Testament saints. Christ, Messiah, was to them the coming One. To us, in that sense—perhaps also in a yet higher sense—Christ has come; that old promise has been fulfilled. And yet Christ is to-day what He has always been—the coming One. Can we profitably think of the *ever-coming One*?

I. **The hope, in the old Church, was Messiah's coming.**—The world, everywhen and everywhere, has its "Golden Age," and it is always somewhere ahead. Men have always been heard saying to their fellows:—

> "Courage, boys, wait and see; Freedom's ahead."

The world would sink into helplessness and despair without that hope. A soul is not lost till it has lost hope. A nation is not lost till it has lost hope. But how did the hope of the Jewish world differ from the hope of the poetical and imaginative world? Precisely in this: that it centred in a *person*. And the person was its manifested God. That hope in a coming person kept up faith in the living God. More than that, better than that, the hope kept up, day by day, the sense of living relations with the living God, and the conviction of the Divine presence and Divine interest. And this helps us to understand and to realise what our hope of Christ's coming should be to us.

II. **The hope, in the modern Church, is Christ's coming.**—That is the "Good time coming" of which the Christian ever dreams and sings. But it is still true that the Christian's hope differs from the world's hope, just as of old. It centres in a *person*. Christian life is love to a person. Christian hope is being with the person we love. 1. See how the Christian's hope keeps up faith in the living God. A faith scarcely needed in this age of "law," and "material success." 2. See how the Christian hope brings Christ into present relations with us. His coming is the consummation and issue of what He is now presiding over. We cannot hold the hope of Christ's coming apart from the spiritual conviction that Christ is now with us.

III. **The Christian hope was held in a formal and material way in the apostolic age.**—Indeed, it could then be held in no other. Pictures always come before principles. That was the child-age of Christianity. The Christian then "understood as a child." The apostles took Christ's words literally. They are not to be so taken, for "they are spirit, and they are life." Apostles expected the return of the Lord in their day, and as a bodily appearance. Were they right? Certainly Christ did not come in their day, just as they expected. Nay, this further is true, Christ has never so come yet: and that could not have been His meaning; that must have enshrined His meaning. The truth is that our Lord put His spiritual meaning into a formal setting, and we have to find His secret.

IV. **The Christian hope gets a final statement in the book of Revelation.**

—Notice the sudden insertion of this verse, and St. John's way of giving a thesis, or summary. He really wrote a book of illustrations of this double point. The Living Christ is always here, and yet is always coming into definite relations, for every emergency of His Church. He is ever working towards His own climax. Christ is always coming for—1. Special help—of the faithful. 2. Special discipline—of the wayward. 3. Special judgment—of the wilful. These are illustrated in the epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia.

The Christ who is the Coming One.—The story of the human race may be read as the story of the successive comings of God in Christ unto it. There have been—1. Comings in sign and symbol, from the first symbol of the Cherubim set watching and guarding the way to the "tree of life." 2. Comings in vision and dream, from the first vision to Abraham, who saw the smoking furnace and burning lamp pass between the severed pieces of the victims. 3. Coming in angel manifestation, from the three men whom Abraham led on their way to make due examination of the truth concerning Sodom. 4. Comings in the flesh: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." 5. Comings in the Spirit—according to the word of the Lord Jesus: "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you." 6. Comings in judgment: all human calamities are Divine visitations. 7. Comings in final judgment: "Inasmuch as He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He hath ordained." The last two of these comings seem to be more especially referred to in this text. Strange, and complex, and difficult to understand, is this book of Revelation. No real and satisfying key for the unlocking of its meaning and message, as a whole, has yet been found. We cannot so precisely recover the associations of St. John's age as to know its excitements, controversies, and national perplexities, and set before ourselves the actual historical materials of the various visions. Indeed, we cannot be sure how much of it is historical, and how much symbolical. And we do not quite understand how Old-Testament images, such as are found in the books of Ezekiel and Daniel, can be put to New-Testament uses. There is an exaggeration and an extravagance about the forms of Eastern poetry, and even of Eastern prose, which sorely puzzles the more orderly and formal Western mind. The contents of the book appear to be a series of Divine judgments, running through the Christian ages; and the text affirms that Christ comes in all these judgments, and works His work of grace, for His people, and for His Church, by means of them. But this is a larger and more comprehensive view of Christ's coming than is usually taken.

I. **Christ coming in judgments.**—Fix these points: judgments in a man's life, or in a nation's life, the book of Revelation teaches us to regard as Christ's coming. Christianity stands in the closest connection with all human calamity. Read the verse in this light. *Clouds:* the recognised symbol of calamity, regarded as Divine judgment. (See associations in Jewish history.) Sometimes "clouds" represent "mystery," but usually "Divine calamity." *Every eye:* we are not able to conceive how this can be one localised event. But it is the fact of the ages. Christ in judgment is universal. Every eye does see him. They who *pierced*: this is for a class. Only one soldier actually pierced; but plainly the words represent the Jews, as a nation, who crucified the Lord. They come into Christly judgments, and, indeed, are under such now. *All kindred*, etc.: who also now come under the Christly testings, as the gospel is preached to them. Jesus is now the World-Test, the Administrator, the Judge. Humanity now stands before God in Christ; all judgment is committed to the Son. Christ does come constantly in judg-

ments on men and nations. No sin ever goes unnoticed. Christ visits for every sin. Bereavement, failure, plague, storm, war, are never seen aright until they are recognised as Christ's comings. It is true of all men. We need not shift our thoughts away to some appalling day in the far future. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." "The avenging Fates are shod with wool," but it only silences, it does not prevent, their coming.

II. **Christ coming to judgment.**—Once for all, to judge your life as a whole, when that life is complete. The "when," the "where," the "how," of that final judgment can only be told us in figures. What we can get firm hold of is this: "Our life on the earth will be estimated by an infallible judge, and our future must depend upon the result." We can also see, more or less perfectly: 1. That God in Christ will be the Judge. 2. That the revelations which God has made to us will be the test. 3. That the disabilities under which men have been placed will all be righteously and graciously estimated. 4. And that all actions will be treated as revealing the will and heart from which they come. Then we ought to live in the clear sense of this twofold judgment relation of Christ. As we know Christ's judgments, in the history of the ages, they have all been designedly corrective. And some are able to cherish the hope that even the final judgment will prove to be corrective, as all the others have been. No one may speak positively on a matter that is not clearly and fully revealed, but it is a sublime possibility that the final judgment may prove to be the judgment of the redeeming love and wrath—the "wrath of the Lamb." Can we add "Christ the *Judge*" to our conception of Christ, and find *that* view of Him add to our confidence and our love? We have not seen the whole of Christ unless we have seen that judgment is committed to Him.

Ver. 7. *Coming with Clouds.*—See Dan. vii. 13. Accompanied or surrounded by clouds; for μετά (with) frequently indicates the relation of a thing with other things which accompany or surround it. The idea here is that He will come seated on a cloud as His throne or chariot, or at least in a cloud moving or conveying these. So God is said to be surrounded, in Ps. xviii. 11. The clouds are His chariot (Ps. civ. 3). Compare also Exod. xix. 16, xl. 34; Isa. vi. 4, xix. 1; Ezek. i. 4. The object of this figurative language is to show that Christ will come in a majestic and awful manner, as enthroned upon a cloud fraught with thunder, lightning, and tempest, and thus will execute vengeance upon His enemies.—*Moses Stuart.*

Christ's Return in Glory.—Did not the Lord declare, in the assembled sanhedrin, and at the very moment when His death was about to put an end to His presence upon earth, "I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of *heaven*"? (Matt. xxvi. 64). In that notable saying, Christ's return in glory, as King and Judge—this latter is the idea implied in the symbol of the *cloud*—is closely connected with the fact of the Ascension. The reason is that in fact from this moment the office fulfilled by Jesus in the world's history is that of establishing, by the instrumentality of preaching, and of the Holy Spirit, whom He sends forth from the seat of His glory, His kingdom in the earth, and of successively overthrowing all the obstacles which oppose themselves to its progress. His glorious appearance, when the close of this period of His working has been reached, will not be His *coming*—for that began to take place from the time of His ascension—but His *advent*. The coming of Christ takes place during the whole of the present age; it will only be consummated in the event which is called the *Parousia*, or advent. Accordingly, the sigh of the Church, and of the inspired bard, who prays in her name, is not, Come *soon*, but, more

exactly and literally, Come *quickly*. This expression refers, properly speaking, not to the nearness of the arrival, but to the rapidity of the journey, though the former is the necessary result of the latter. This coming of Christ, from the time of the Ascension to the time of the Parousia, is therefore the true subject of the Apocalypse, just as His first coming, between the fall of man and the Incarnation, was the true subject of Old-Testament prophecy. "Behold, He shall come," said the last of the prophets, at the highest summit of ancient revelation, speaking of the Messiah-Jehovah (Mal. iii. 1). The history of the world, in its essential character, is summed up in these three sayings: He is coming; He has come; He will come again. It is upon this idea that the whole plan of the apocalyptic drama rests. In every journey we contemplate, as distinct from one another, the starting point, the journey itself, and the arrival.—*F. Godet, D.D.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verse 8.

The Eternity of God.—It is thought by many that this must be a description of the Lord Jesus, and a distinct assertion of His divinity. But it would appear more simple and natural to regard it as a solemn repetition of ver. 4, especially as the words "the beginning and the ending" are of doubtful authority. Among the Rabbins the expression from א to ת is a common one, employed to designate the whole of anything, from the beginning to the end. *Stuart* regards God as the speaker. But elsewhere (Rev. i. 17, xxii. 13) the same thing is directly asserted of Christ, whom we believe to be one with the Father in nature, but other than the Father in manifestation. We can form no proper conception of beings that had no beginning. We had; everybody with whom we have to do had; everything around us had. And it is almost as impossible for us to conceive of beings that have no ending. Everybody and everything seems to have a limited existence, and the apparently simple idea of the continuity of life our minds seem unable really to grasp. At least so far as the earth-life is concerned, everything has a beginning and an ending. See, then, what a sublime assertion of Divine superiority is made when we are required to form three conceptions of God. 1. He exists. It is all that can be said about Him. He is the "I am," dependent on nobody and nothing, adversely affected by nobody and nothing. 2. He always did exist. Carry the story of the world back, if you will, through millions of ages, God was before the first age begun. What changes He must have seen! How little He is affected by changes that seem overwhelming to us! 3. He always will exist. To say nothing of the little story of that Christian age, the whole story of the world's ages is as nothing in His sight. Egypt gone, Babylon gone, Rome gone, but God abides. The seemingly long history of the world—of humanity in the world—is but an episode in His eternity, and readily grasped in one vision by Him. What grounds of fear can that Church have which is *His Church in the World*?

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 8. *The Eternal Life of Christ in Heaven.*—One fact confers peculiar interest on the book of Revelation. Christ speaks by His Spirit in all Scripture, but here we have Him speaking in His own person to the mortal followers He left behind Him. But a change has passed over Him since the times of Capernaum and Bethany. Yet, notwithstanding all the pomp of celestial grandeur, how remarkable is the minuteness of anxiety which the messages of this wonderful Being manifest! He is represented as walking in the midst of seven golden lamps, which are Churches, to typify

His indwelling presence and pervading care; and each Church is warned with a precision and particularity that evince how impossible it is to evade His scrutiny or defeat His purposes of retribution. What His present relation may be to other worlds we know not, but we do know that His relation to us is as intimate and incessant as if no other object existed to occupy His thoughts. In His highest glory we are all personally interested. All His powers and privileges of being our eternal Governor, Guide, and Friend, are founded on the great declaration, "I am alive for evermore." Christ, who "liveth for evermore," is set forth in two great characters, in both of which His eternal life in glory is momentous to our interests. In relation to *sin* He is a mediator of justification and holiness; in relation to *death* and *pain*, He is the author of endless life and glory. 1. As regards the conflict with sin, He justifies and sanctifies. Both are based upon the redemption through *blood*: it is the sacrifice that gives our Mediator the right, either to vindicate or purify His faithful. (1) How, then, is the perpetuity of Christ in heaven connected with the work of our *justication*? In the epistle to the Hebrews we are shown the immeasurable superiority of the dispensation of Christ to the typical dispensation of Aaron. It shows us that the covenant of Christ is better, for it is a covenant of grace; the consecration of Christ better, for it was attested with the solemnity of a Divine oath; the tabernacle of Christ better, for it is the eternal heaven; the sacrifice of Christ better, for it alone can truly take away sins; the priesthood of Christ better, for it is everlasting, after the order of Melchizedek. The writer establishes the pre-eminence of the sacrifice and the priesthood, by insisting on the *singleness* of the sacrifice and the *perpetuity* of the priesthood. This priesthood of Christ, then, being perpetual, yet employing but a single sacrificial act, it must consist in a constant reference to that sacrifice of which His own blessed person stands in heaven as the undying memorial. He became human that He might save; His perpetuated humanity is, in heaven, the token and warrant of salvation, the vestment of the Divine priesthood; that we should be there recognised as blessed, it is enough that the Son of God be there recognised as a man. (2) The eternal life of Christ in heaven is yet more directly the fountain of blessing to us, in being the immediate source, not only of justification, but also of *holiness*; not only of gracious acceptance into the favour of God, but of all the bright train of inward graces by which that favour effectuates itself in us. It is the perpetual lesson of Scripture that we should fix our hearts in entire dependence on Christ Jesus. He suspends us on Himself for our whole spiritual existence; He will have us trace every emotion of faith, hope, and love, to His bounty. This communication of Himself is no less necessary in heaven than on earth. If the holiness be everlasting, the source that supplies it must be everlasting too. We have no reason to suppose that the dependence on Christ shall ever cease; our very exaltation shall be but to feel that dependence more nearly, to lean on that Arm more trustingly, to look up to those Divine Eyes with more affectionate confidence. He is "alive for evermore," that He may be to us the everlasting fountain of our holiness. The abiding sanctity of His nature is the condition of ours. In the eternal laws of the Divine reason, it is decreed that Christ shall be the authorised dispenser of spiritual blessedness to His redeemed, that every grace shall flow through this channel, or cease to flow.

II. Christ is "alive for evermore" as the eternal antagonist and conqueror of physical evil, pain, and death. He is the radiant centre of life itself, and happiness, to all that truly lives. He has the "keys of death and of Hades," that is, He possesses the power of liberating from the bonds of death those confined in the intermediate

state. Human death is the result of human sin. The eternal overthrow of sin, by the eternal life of Christ, involves the overthrow of that which is but a consequence of sin, and the conquest of death is the conquest of all—pain, disquietude, disease—that disposes to it, and in it ultimately terminates. First and second death are spoken of. Christ is the destroyer of one, the ruler and restricter of the other. The first form of death results on the sin of nature, and is therefore universal as *it* is; the second form, which perhaps is naturally the sequel or maturity of the former, is, by the mercy of God, restricted to unpardoned guilt. There is an eternal alliance, in the primitive counsel of God, between life and happiness. Even on earth, beings are made alive in order to be happy; this is the original law, and general rule. Scripture uses the word "life" to imply "felicity," and "eternal life" to imply "eternal felicity." Glorious alliance. It shall be bound eternally in heaven, when He who is "alive for evermore," shall, in the power and diffusion of that life, spread around Him happiness with it co-extensive and commingled. Every blessing that belongs to our inheritance centres in this great truth, that He who "was dead" is now "alive for evermore." In Him newly born, we in Him die, rise, and ascend; our life is the reflection of His, if, spiritually quickened by Him, we too, like Him, are even now, and hereafter are destined yet more gloriously to be, "alive for evermore."—*W. Archer Butler, M.A.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 9—11.

A Sublime Commission.

I. **To whom did it come?**—John; without any reasonable doubt, John, the beloved apostle. Certainly the most fitting of the apostles to deal with the new conception of the person, and present mission, of the Living Christ. But he puts in no claim to be heard on the ground of the insight which his mystical temperament brought him. He does not even claim on the ground of his apostleship. There is a great tenderness in his simple appeal to a common experience. It is as if he said, "You are in much anxiety and distress for Christ's sake, and so am I. You are trying to be patient and trustful under the strain, and so am I. My experiences have brought to me most comforting and reassuring visions; I will tell them to you, so that you may be comforted by them, as I have been." It is precisely the mission of those who have much common experience, and some unusual experience, in Christian life, to cheer and help their Christian brethren. Nothing brings soul so near to soul as companionship in tribulation, and fellow-experience of the need of Divine patience.

II. **Under what circumstances did the commission come?**—St. John was at the time separated from his people and from his ministry. It was a time of forced seclusion, and lonely meditation, with such natural associations of sea and sky as might help to fitting moods. Take into due account St. John's mystical temperament, meditative habits, recent trying experiences, sense of having a trust from Christ, and immediate surroundings, we can see that he was the fitting man to receive this commission, and that it came at a fitting time. Such a series of visions probably occupied the apostle for many weeks, and the series could only be maintained when he was undisturbed by immediate claims of duty. The strange times of life are often the great times of life. Illustrate Luther at the Wartburg, Bunyan in Bedford goal.

III. **What form did the commission take?**—A series of visions, not in any chronological order, but apparently visions of the same scenes taken from different points of view. St. John received the commission from One whose voice was as arresting as a trumpet-call. But it was no vague blare of

trumpet; it spoke in intelligible language, though using strange figures and symbols.

IV. **To whom was the messsge to be sent?**—To seven particular Churches. Why to these? Possibly because they were grouped in one district, and bore one general character. Possibly because they had become the special "diocese" of St. John. Possibly because they would effectively illustrate the main varieties marking the Churches that make up the *one Church* of the redeemed. It is clear that our interest is not to be wholly absorbed by the particular epistles to particular Churches, since the message is to the whole Church of all the ages; and we have only to see that the various forms of strain and tribulation through which the Church passes are necessary, because the discipline must be adapted to a variety of conditions. And this variety of conditions is represented by the description of the states in which the Living Christ found these seven Churches. The Church has its own particular temptations and trials in each successive age. It may always cherish this assurance: in the hands of Christ they bear direct disciplinary relations to its particular weaknesses, or failings.

Note on Patmos.—One of the Sporades, the south-eastern group of the islands of the Ægean. According to tradition, as given by Victorinus, St. John was condemned to work in the *mines*—which, if trustworthy, must mean marble quarries, as there are no mines, strictly speaking, in the island. Christians were sent to the mines (Roman Christians to Sardinia) at least as early as the reign of Commodus, and this was much the commonest punishment during the Diocletian persecution, in which Victorinus himself suffered. In St. John's time it was commoner to put Christians to death. But the tradition is probably right: "deportation," confinement, without hard labour, on a lonely island was then and afterwards reserved for offenders of higher secular rank.—*W. H. Simcox, M.A.*

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 9. *The Kingdom and Patience.*—What wicked men have done with Divine Revelation as a whole, good men have done with that part of it which we call by itself "the Revelation." You commonly divide the enemies of truth into such as believe more than they ought, and such as believe less than they ought. Superstition the crime of the first, infidelity the crime of the other. These are the errors that divide the readers of the Apocalypse. One order of readers goes too far, professing to understand so as to expound and clear up the whole of it; another order almost entirely pass the book by, as if the Canon never contained it. Never give to mysteries the go-by because they *are* mysteries. There would be nothing left for you to love, nothing to admire, if you banished all but what you could comprehend. Learn what you can, and follow on to know the mysteries of God's words and ways. How came these two words "kingdom" and "patience" together, as if they properly belonged to each other? And how can we be "companions" with John in these two things? The first thing we have to admire is "the *patience* of Jesus Christ." Was it to the glory forsaken *before* His death, or the glory inherited *after* His death, that the word "kingdom" alluded? The latter must have been intended. St. John could be no partner in the glory that preceded the Advent. Nor could any of us be companions in that glory. So that the kingdom was the "kingdom" that *followed* the "patience." But the two epochs in Messiah's career—the earthly and the heavenly, the atoning and the triumphing—seem, in the text, as if run into one another, as it were, without a break. Nay, the "kingdom"

is actually put *before* the "patience," to perfect the union between the dying and the living for evermore; to illustrate the *hold* He had upon His reward while He was earning it; the "joy that was set before Him," supporting and staying His spirit while enduring the cross and despising the shame. These are the very twin doctrines of our salvation: that Jesus Christ *suffered*, else we are yet unforgiven; and that Jesus Christ now *reigns* after the suffering, else we preach in vain, and believe in vain. The "patience" takes away our sins. The "kingdom" preserves us from sinning. But if Jesus was manifested to take away our sins, He was manifested also to set us an example, so that, besides being *believers* in His "kingdom and patience," we are, in our degree, to *share* in both the one and the other. How may we become *companions* with Christ, as well as pensioners on His sacrifice? We are not glorified as soon as justified. We must be "made perfect through suffering." And we, too, "have need of patience," and in experience of tribulations we become *companions* in the patience of Jesus Christ. But there is no "patience" where there is not also the "kingdom." As men we suffer; as redeemed men we sit enthroned. The servants of the Saviour live a double life. "As unknown, and yet well-known; as dying, and behold we live," etc. Take, then, the *patience*, lest you mount too high; and take also the *kingdom*, lest you sink too low.—*Henry Christopherson.*

John's Banishment.—It has been beautifully said that his "banishment from his earthly home lifted him nearer a heavenly one; there he saw a glory he never witnessed in Jerusalem. So Martin Luther, during his confinement in Wartburg, translated the Scriptures, and had the enjoyment of a freedom and repose to which thousands outside were strangers" (*Cumming*). The banishment of John is not the only instance in which God has made the wrath of man to praise Him. "Satan is not always wise. For him it would have been better had he never persecuted Paul. He put him in prison, and there he wrote some of his beautiful epistles, which have done more for the world's good than all his preaching. He had better, for his own interests, have never put poor John Bunyan in gaol, for there he wrote the book which has immortalised his name, and done, perhaps, more injury than any other work, save the Bible, to Satan's kingdom."—*Thomas Jones.*

The Efficiency of the Passive Virtues.—Kingdom and patience! a very singular conjunction of terms, to say the least; as if in Jesus Christ were made compatible authority and suffering, the impassive throne of a monarch and the meek subjection of a cross, the reigning power of a prince and the meek subjection of a lamb. What more striking paradox! And yet in this you have exactly that which is the prime distinction of Christianity. Christ reigns over human souls and in them, erecting there His spiritual kingdom, not by force of will exerted in any way, but through His most sublime passivity in yielding Himself to the wrong and the malice of His adversaries. It is a kind of first principle, in a good life, that the passive elements, or graces of the Christian life, well maintained, are quite as efficient and fruitful as the active. Nothing discouraging need be said concerning what are called *active* works in religion, when we point out the efficiency of those virtues which belong to the receiving, suffering, patient side of character. They are such as meekness, gentleness, forbearance, forgivingness, the endurance of wrong without anger or resentment, contentment, quietness, peace, and unambitious love. These are gathered up in the comprehensive term "*patience.*" These are never barren forces; they are, in fact, the most efficient and most operative powers that a Christian wields, inasmuch as they carry just

that kind of influence which other men are least apt and least able to resist. Power is not measured by exertion. A right passivity is sometimes the greatest and most effective Christian power.

I. The passive and submissive virtues are most of all remote from the exercise or attainment of those who are out of the Christian spirit and the life of faith. All men are able to be active; but when you come to the passive, or receiving, side of life, here they fail. A true Christian man is distinguished from other men, not so much by his beneficent works as by his patience. In this he most excels and rises highest above the mere natural virtues of the world. Just here it is that he is looked upon as a peculiar and partially Divine character. Consider the immense power of principle that is necessary to establish the soul in these virtues of endurance and patience. Here is no place for ambition, no stimulus of passion. The Christian gets the power of his patience wholly from above. It is not human; it is Divine. Hence the impossibility of it, even to great men. It is chiefly by this endurance of evil that Christ, as a Redeemer, prevails against the sin of the human heart and subdues its enmity. Jesus said, "The prince of this world is judged," as if the kingdom of evil were now to be crushed, and His own new kingdom established, by some terrible bolt of judgment falling on His adversaries. It was even so; and that bolt of judgment was the passion of the cross. We had never seen before the sublime passivities of God's character, and His ability to endure the madness of evil. In the cross we see Him bearing wrong, receiving the shafts of human enmity, submitting Himself, in His sublime patience, to the fury of the disobedient, and so melting down by His gentleness what no terrors could intimidate, and no frowns of judgment could subdue. Men, as being under sin, are set against all active efforts to turn them, or persuade them, but never against that which implies no effort—viz., the gentle virtue of patience. We are naturally jealous of control by any method which involves a fixed design to exert control over us; therefore we are always on our guard in this direction. But we are none the less open, at all times, to the power of silent worth, and the unpretending goodness of those virtues that are included in patience. The submissive forms of excellence provoke no opposition, because they are not put forth for us, but for their own sake. They move us the more because they do not attempt to move us. See how little impression is often made upon you by the most strenuous efforts to exert influence over you, and then how often you are swayed by feelings of respect, reverence, admiration, tenderness, from the simple observation of one who suffers well. How gently do these lovely powers of patience insinuate themselves into your respect and love. Notice some of the instructive and practical uses of the truth illustrated. 1. It is here that Christianity makes issue with the whole world on the question of human greatness. That is ever looked on by mankind, and spoken of, as greatness which displays some form of active power. It has never entered into human thought, unsanctified by religion, that there is or can be any such thing as greatness in the mere passive virtues, or in simply suffering well; least of all in suffering wrong and evil with a forgiving, unresentful spirit. Christianity is here alone, holding it forth as being, when required, the Divinest, sublimest, and most powerful of all virtues, to suffer well. 2. The office of the Christian martyrs is here explained. In the martyr ages we see a vast array of active genius and power, that could not be permitted to spend itself in works of benefaction to the race, but was consecrated of God to the more sacred and more fruitful grace of suffering. The design was, it would seem, to prepare a Christly past, to show whole ages of faith populated by men who were able, coming after their Master and

bearing His cross, to suffer with Him, and add their human testimony to His. 3. We see how it is that so many persons are so abundantly active in religion, with so little effect, while others, who are not so conspicuous in action, accomplish so much. The reason is, that one class trust mainly to the virtues of action, while the others unite also the virtues of patience. 4. The reason why we have so many crosses, trials, wrongs, and pains, is here made evident. We have not too many occasions given us for the exercise of patience. 5. Possibly men not religious are averted from the Christian life more by their dislike of the submissive and gentle virtues than by any distaste of sacrifice and active duty.—*H. Bushnell, D.D.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 12—20.

The Symbolic Presentation of Christ in His Church.—There are two possible conceptions of the continuity of Christ's life and ministry from the time of His resurrection. The usual thought of Him is of One who has passed into heaven, and there acts as Mediator, Intercessor, High Priest, for His people. That idea is specially elaborated in the epistle to the Hebrews. The less usual thought, but the one which is every day gaining more interest and importance, conceives Christ as actually having come again, as He said He would, and being actively engaged in His Church, for His Church's good; but in spiritual, not in sensible fashion. So present, this vision represents—

I. **His place.**—"In the midst of the seven golden candlesticks" (ver. 13). In the centre, the middle, the very heart of the Church, so as to have full control, out to the circumference.

II. **His office.**—This appears to be indicated by His dress (ver. 13). The long robe, indicating the *priest*; the peculiar position of the girdle indicating the King.

III. **His character** (vers. 14, 15).—The figures indicate absolute and dazzling, glistering, whiteness. Not merely a passive holiness, but an active holiness which *makes holy*. It shines and makes shining.

IV. **His mission.**—Symbolled by the two-edged sword proceeding out of His mouth. He had to search the Churches, and solemnly declare the truth concerning them, however severe and humiliating it might have to be. Symbolled, too, in a countenance like the sun, withering up all falseness and evil. St. John's fear in the presence of this symbolled Christ represents the fear which the Church always has when it realises that the Living Christ is inspecting it, and critically searching it. The response to St. John's fear represents the response Christ makes to the Church's fear. It may be stated in this way. Christ—the Living, Present Christ—compasses the *Christian* ages even as God compasses *all* ages. Therefore, Christ can fully control and use all the evil influences that may be affecting His Church, making "all things work together for good."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 12. *The Candelabrum of the Apocalypse.*—This is a striking symbol of the Church. Herein we see—

I. The **position** of the Church—without the veil.

II. Its **work.**—To exhibit light—that is, Christ.

III. Its **unity.**—Many lamps, but one light.

IV. The **source of its vitality.**—Continually fed by the Holy Ghost.

V. Its **beauty.**—Each branch richly ornamented.

VI. Its **value.**—the candelabrum was gold—believers are Christ's jewels. Application: 1. How great the honours! 2. How certain the safety, of believers!—*R. A. Griffin.*

Ver. 13. *Symbols of the Living Christ.*—Here our Lord appeared to St. John, clothed in all the insignia which serve as emblems of the different aspects of His glory. It is specially important to notice that it is from this general picture of the glory of the Lord that the particular emblems in which He appears to each particular Church are drawn. "These emblems represent the qualities in virtue of which He will have power to do all that He announces to them."

The Symbolism of Numbers.—There is an alternation of praise and blame, answering to the even and odd numbers included in seven. The law according to which the Seven Churches have been disposed in the picture seems to be this: the numbers one, three, five, and seven, indicate the different degrees of the dominion of sin over the Christian life in a Church—its graduation in evil. The numbers two, four, and six, indicate, on the contrary, the different degrees of the victory gained by the work of God over sin—its progress in good.—*F. Godet, D.D.*

Vers. 17, 18. *Christ Risen, Living, and Life-giving.*—The point of interest in these verses is this: they present St. John's full and final impression of the person of Christ. A revelation by vision of the Risen Christ was given to St. John, because he would be specially sensitive to visions, his mystical, meditative mood of mind enabling him most effectively to deal with this mode of revelation. Compare the visions given to St. Paul, as a sufferer in Christ's service; and to St. Peter, as a leader into the larger truth. St. John's gospel concerns the person of Christ. He is not mainly interested in what Jesus did, but in what Jesus *was*, and in the things which revealed what He was. The synoptists relate what Christ said and did, without having any argumentative purpose in their narrations—or we may say, they give us history for beginners, the record of facts; but St. John gives us history for advanced students, the philosophy of the facts. The explanation of St. John's peculiar point of view is found—1. In his nature, which may be compared with that of Mary of Bethany. 2. In the fact that he was brought to Christ by the personal influence of Christ. That fixed his lifelong interest upon Christ Himself. For many long years he had meditated on his theme, and, through his meditations, had kept the personal influence of the Living and Spiritual Christ strong upon him. And the heretical teachings of his day made him increasingly zealous to uphold views that honoured Christ; so he became the guide and helper of advanced Christians, who are spiritually-minded, mystical, and able to grow into discernment of those spiritual and eternal truths which underlie varying forms, and can gain expression through ever-varying forms. St. John can lead all who have the insight of love. It is well for us to keep in mind that Christianity, as a system, unfolded along two distinct lines. 1. Led by St. Paul, the doctrine of Christ's *work* was gradually elaborated; and, 2. Led by St. John, the doctrine of Christ's *person*. There is a Jewish way of reading the Crucifixion: there is a Pauline way, and there is a Johannine way. From this last point of view it appears as the great *self-sacrifice*. He laid down His life that He might take it again. St. John wants to know what the Crucifixion teaches concerning the person of Christ. There are three ways of treating our Lord's resurrection: 1. We may collect evidences of it as an actual event in history. This is the familiar method of the ordinary ministry. The evidences include (1) Scriptural anticipations of it; (2) Christ's prophetic words in relation to it; (3) historical facts concerning it; (4) historical results of it, in the martyr-witness of apostles, and in the founding of the Church. 2. We may endeavour to discover the doctrinal significance of it. Christian facts and truths have been shaped into systems;

for the completion of every system, Christ's resurrection is found to be absolutely essential. No Christian doctrinal system will hold together that denies it. 3. We may try to get at the spiritual significance of it, as a revelational experience through which Christ passed. Revelational, as carrying a revelation to us concerning Christ's person. This last is St. John's way. It is suggestive to compare the accounts of the resurrection-period in the synoptists with those given in St. John. What St. John felt had been taught him concerning the person and relations of the Risen Christ is embodied in our text, which records an immediate revelation made to the apostle, but as truly expresses the sanctified impression of more than fifty years of thought about Christ, and fellowship with Him.

I. **Christ as the Living One.**—He has life in Himself. That life was in a human body. That life now is in a spiritual body. He is "Christ who is our life." In what sense are we said to *live*? Distinguish the derived life of the creature from the absolute life of God. Compare the terms "Living one," and "I am." The *manifested* life is this Divine, uncaused, eternal life of God, set in human conditions and limitations.

II. **Christ as the Life-yielding One.**—Explain that the Divine life could not be yielded. Absolute, unbroken continuity belongs to its very essence. The *manifest* life, the human life which was the agency of the manifestation, alone could be yielded. The heresy attributed to Cerinthus was but an imperfect, unworthy, and dangerous setting of a spiritual truth, which needs to be recovered, and worthily stated. The Divine Being, Christ, did not die, could not die; the "Man, Christ Jesus," died. Word-settings constantly imperil spiritual verities.

II. **Christ as the Life-Resuming One.**—"Am alive." The idea which the apostles were likely to take up was that *Christ* was dead, because Christ's body lay in Joseph's new tomb. They had, therefore, in some outwardly evidential way, to be shown that His body was not He. It could be changed for a spiritual body, and *He* remain the same. *He* lives. It may be said, "Christ died." And with equal truth it may be said, "Christ never died."

IV. **Christ as the Life-Giving One.**—"Keys of Death and Hades." He who has only *derived* life cannot *quicken* life. You may pull a flower to pieces, but you cannot put it together again, and breathe life into it, though you have a derived life in you. He who has life in Himself can quicken life. Death and Hades for bodies are but types of all kinds of deaths—deaths of feeling, deaths of power, deaths of sin, deaths of backsliding, deaths of doubt; but from *all* deaths the Risen and Living One can quicken us. St. John saw Christ in the vision *as He is*, as He permanently is, the Living One who gives life; who is ever giving life; who has come that "we may have life, and have it more abundantly." That is our Christ. That is Christ who "is our life."

The Self-description of the Risen Christ.

I. **"I am He that liveth."**—That word "liveth" is a word of continuous, perpetual life. It describes the external existence which has no beginning and no end; which, considered in its purity and perfectness, has no present, and no past, but one eternal and unbroken present—one eternal now. It is the "I am" of the Jehovah who spoke to Moses. "He that liveth" is the Living One; He whose life is The Life, complete in itself, and including all other lives within itself. If anything has come to us to make us think what a fragmentary thing our human life is, there is no greater knowledge for us to win than that the life of One who loves us as Christ loves us is an eternal life, with the continuance and unchangeableness of eternity. It is the thought of an eternal God that really gives consistency to the frag-

mentary lives of men, the fragmentary history of the world.

II. **"I am He that liveth, and was dead."**—Into that life of lives death has come—as an episode, an incident. When death came to Him it was seen to be, not the end of life, but only an event in life. It did not close His being, but it was only an experience which that being underwent. This is the wonder of Christ's death. It was an experience of life, not an end of life. Life goes on through it and comes out unharmed.

III. **"I am alive for evermore."**—This existence after death is special and different. "Alive for evermore" is an assurance that in the continued life which has once passed through the experience of death there is something new, another sympathy, the only one which before could have been lacking, with His brethren whose lot it is to die, and so a helpfulness to them which could not otherwise have been, even in His perfect love. This new life, the life that has conquered death by tasting it—this life stretches on and out for ever. Think what that great self-description of the Saviour means, and what it is to us. What do we need, we men? Think of the certainty, yet mystery, of death. Christ's words come to us, and at once death changes from the terrible end of life into a most mysterious, but no longer terrible, experience of life. Not merely is there a future beyond the grave, but it is inhabited by One who speaks to us, who went there by the way that we must go, who sees us and can help us as we make our way along, and will receive us when we come there. Then is not all changed?

IV. **"Have the keys of hell and of death."**—Hell, of course, means Hades, that unseen place, that place of departed spirits in which our creed expresses its belief. Christ, then, having experienced death, has the keys of death to open its meaning, and to guide the way through it for those who are to die like Him. It is because He died that He holds the keys of death. Can we not understand that? Do we not know how any soul that has passed through a great experience holds the keys of that experience, so that he can help those who have to pass through it? Having the keys of death and hell, He comes to us as we are drawing near to death, and He opens the door on both sides of it, and lets us look through it, and shows us immortality. What is it to be immortal and to know it? What is it to have death broken down, so that life stretches out beyond it—the same life as this, opening, expanding, but for ever the same essentially? 1. Think of the immense and noble freedom from many of the most trying and vexatious of our temptations, which comes to a man to whom the curtain has been lifted, and the veil rent in twain. 2. The whole position of duty is elevated by the thought, the knowledge, of immortality. 3. A new life is given to friendship, to all our best relations, to one another, by the power of immortality.—*Phillips Brooks.*

Ver. 18. *Christ in Glory.*—1. These are the words of our Lord, and they were spoken by Him in glory. Some have gathered together the sayings of Christ in different periods. For instance, His utterances during His Passion; His Seven Sayings from the Cross on Good Friday; His words during the great Forty Days of the Risen Life; and His words from heaven. The Church to-day does not direct our eyes to the empty tomb, but to the vision of Christ in glory. 2. The words were addressed to St. John—the disciple whom Christ had drawn near to Him, with St. Peter and St. James, in the Garden of Gethsemane; the disciple who stood, with Christ's blessed mother, beneath the cross, and watched Him in His dying hours; who was last at the cross and early at the sepulchre; the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (John xiii. 23). Differences of substance and style between the Apocalypse and the fourth gospel are certainly not sufficient to justify the

conclusion that it is not the same St. John who wrote both. 3. They were words of encouragement. John had another legacy besides that blessed one, Christ's mother; he had the legacy of tribulation. He was realising the Lord's prophecy, "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John xvi. 33). He was partaker "in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." He was an exile in the Isle of Patmos "for the testimony of Jesus Christ"—a wretched, barren, desolate spot; and then condemned to work in the mines, if the statement of Victorinus can be relied upon; at any rate, a solitary exile in a remote island. It was there the Lord appeared to His servant, to strengthen and sustain him. What do the words of the text teach us about Christ? What about ourselves?

I. **They point to Christ in Glory.**—1. They may seem in this respect to antedate the Festival of the Ascension. Christ did not enter into glory—that is, did not *visibly* assume a glorious condition—on Easter Day. We know this by the narrative in the gospels. The glorious Form which appeared to St. John made him fall "at His feet as dead" (Rev. i. 17); but in the Risen Life, during the Great Forty Days, we read of no such manifestation. On the contrary, Christ is taken for the gardener. He stands, unknown, upon the shore; He joins the disciples on the road to Emmaus as an ordinary wayfarer; He dines with His disciples. No rays of glory emanate from His countenance or illuminate His garments. He does not force the human will to acknowledge Him by some overwhelming manifestation. When they saw Him on the mountain in Galilee, "some doubted" (Matt. xxviii. 17). He reserved the light of glory till He entered the land of glory. He was "received up in glory" (1 Tim. iii. 16). The Church seems to desire to set Christ before us in all His perfected glory in heaven, that our joy may be full; and our Lord Himself, in the same way, over-leaps the interval between Easter and Ascension Day in the question to the two disciples: "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" (Luke xxiv. 26). 2. The text teaches us the sameness of Christ, the identity of His person: "I am He that liveth, and was dead." The angels impressed the same truth upon the minds of the apostles at the Ascension: "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts i. 11). Our Lord not only speaks of Himself as the Living One, but also refers to His death: "and was dead." I am the same you watched upon the cross. The waters of Lethe do not sponge out the marks of life on earth. Though in glory, the memory of the Passion was still fresh. He who was conceived and born of Mary, dwelt in Nazareth, preached in the towns and villages of Judæa and Galilee, died upon the cross, rested in Joseph's tomb, went to "the spirits in prison," vanquished death, and rose from the dead on the third day, is the same who sits in glory at the Father's right hand.

II. The text carries with it **the conviction of our own identity hereafter.**—1. The truth which Easter teaches is that of our own immortality. There are many "indications" of man's survival after death, but only one proof. The yearning for a life beyond the grave has been regarded as a witness to its existence, on the ground that nature's desires are not futile. The consciousness that we are something more than flesh has been appealed to. The analogy of chrysalis and butterfly has been laid under contribution as suggestive. The moral argument is, that if there be a just God, the "cruel wrongs of time" must be rectified hereafter. The simplicity of the soul's essence has been regarded as inferring its indestructibility, and the scientific doctrine that no force is ever destroyed. The goodness and purpose of God in creating man have seemed incompatible with a belief in annihilation. These and other indications of

man's immortality can be enumerated, all forming accumulative inference of great force; but the one proof is the resurrection of Christ. He rose from the dead, "the First-fruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. xv. 20), and He entered into heaven "to open the kingdom of heaven to all believers." The doctrine of our resurrection rests upon the historic fact of Christ's resurrection. Life and immortality have been brought to light through the gospel (2 Tim. i. 10). 2. Further, we see that Easter teaches that our immortality is *personal.* The same who lived and died shall rise again and live for ever. No other immortality, of a lower kind, can satisfy us. The immortality of matter, of force, of mind, of love, of fame, are mere shadows; the substance is the survival of the *personal* life. The memory links us with the past; it is a ground of identification: "liveth, and was dead." And this carries with it the truth of recognition in another life.

III. **Lessons.**—1. Joy in the triumph of Christ over death and hell. 2. The realisation of a *present* Christ, who, though in glory, can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, through His experience of trial and temptation, of suffering and death, whilst on earth. 3. To rise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, from the penitence of Lent to the new life of Easter-tide. 4. Through the grace of Easter communion to seek the virtue of *perseverance,* so as not to fall back into sin, but, like Christ, to be "alive for evermore."—"*The Thinker.*"

The Risen Saviour.—From death to life is the greatest possible transition, and this transition, in the case of Jesus of Nazareth, is the most marvellous as well as the most perfect. It is the only true victory ever won. Warriors conquer to be conquered. Tyrants rule with a rod of iron to fall under its stroke. All men that rise, rise to fall. From the dust we came, and to the dust we must return. But the text speaks of a final victory: "I am alive for evermore." The aged St. John was an exile in the lone island of Patmos. He had been banished thither "for the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ." He was not there alone. John, "the beloved disciple," and Jesus, the loving Saviour, have again met in a strange land. The visit of the Saviour was special, and John was elevated to heights of inspiration far above that which he had experienced before. He received visions and revelations of a transcendent nature. The whole panorama of the future passed before his eyes. He saw the rise and fall of empires. The terrible conflict between good and evil was waged in his presence. He saw the rise of the kingdom of the Messiah, and the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven. Patmos was the only place, and the banishment from Society the only condition, suitable to such a revelation. But the aged apostle needed the assurance that the old Master was communing with him. So he is led back to the impressive scene of the Crucifixion: "I am He that liveth, and was dead." Some sixty years previously John stood before the cross, and for that long period he had preached Christ and Him crucified, in the cities of Asia Minor. He was drawn nearer to the Saviour than he had ever been before when he saw Him on the cursed tree. It was a time of sorrow, followed by a few days of painful suspense. But the spell was broken. The tidings came that Jesus was risen. Peter and John ran towards the sepulchre; John outran Peter, and was first at the grave. He found none there: the sepulchre was empty. Then, in the upper room, the tidings were confirmed, when His glorious form appeared, and the familiar Voice was heard saying, "Peace be unto you!" Their hearts throbbed with that joy ever after. Finally, they saw Him ascend, and a cloud veiled Him, that they saw Him not again. There, on the road to Bethany, they knew that He was alive for evermore. John, in Patmos, felt that only one could have

uttered the words of the text. To those who have afflicted their souls, and have deepened their sense of demerit in the garden and at the cross, we now say, Arise, wipe off your tears, remove the sackcloth of penitence, *rejoice*, and look at your Living Lord.

I. **Let us contemplate the resurrection of the Lord as a great historical fact.**—It is the central fact of Christianity, and the key-note of apostolic preaching. If the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus is a myth, the gospel has no sun for a centre of light and heat. The sanhedrin spread the calumny that the disciples stole the body. If so, we ask, what became of the body? The disciples were a few poor fishermen from Galilee, without standing or confederates at Jerusalem. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were the only two persons of influence, in Jerusalem, who were in any way identified with Christ. Did they lend themselves to the fraud? Under the circumstances, and in such a climate, how was the removal and the re-interment of the body possible? Can you conceive of any band of men making a sacrifice of every comfort, and facing a frowning world, with its torture and death, to propagate a conscious fraud? We turn away in haste from the absurdity. Another supposition has been started: that the death of Jesus was only apparent. This incredible view received its birth from two cases of crucified persons restored to life, mentioned by the historian Josephus. Leaving aside the flat contradiction which even the sanhedrin would give to such a supposition, how was it possible to restore animation after the spear-wound in His side, and the long hours of interment? This hypothesis is a greater absurdity than the first. We mention a third supposition: that the various appearances of Christ to His disciples after His death were visions, or apparitions. In France the effort has been made to prove that Christianity owes its potency to the morbid condition of Mary Magdalene —yea, to the hallucination of a nervous woman. In Germany, Straus and others, with more apparent decency, have endeavoured to build up something like an argument on the power of vision, arising from a strong desire to see Jesus. When it is said that he appeared to the eleven, to Paul, and to more than five hundred brethren at once, we are simply to understand a mental vision, arising from the feeling of hero-worship. But we have so much supposition to make that the most elementary principles of psychology must be discarded to do so. We must suppose between five and six hundred persons to be exactly of the same temperament and expectation, so that they had precisely the same mental vision. These persons are credited with sincerity by the holders of this view; but, if so, the world would question their sanity. We have briefly stated absolutely all that has ever been advanced against the great fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. How flimsy! Human credulity even rejects all such suppositions. The resurrection of Christ is a significant fact. It brings to light the truth that there is a living and personal God—that He presides over human affairs. A revelation of His will is made, in which He has promised a Saviour for mankind. That Saviour is no other than His own Son. The resurrection verified the life of Jesus. St. Peter, looking at the perfection of that life, has said of death, "It was not possible that He should be holden of it." Life is greater than mortality, and moral law is superior to the decay of nature. The natural order of creation is that life is stronger than death, otherwise spring would never follow winter. By analogy, a life of so much purity and force as that of Christ could not be holden of death. St. Paul speaks of the priesthood of Jesus as possessing the "power of an endless life"; and again the fact of the resurrection is confirmed by the abiding vitality of the Saviour's life as witnessed in the lives of thousands. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth

forth much fruit." The death on the cross is followed by life everlasting, both to the Holy Victim and to them that believe on Him. The miracle of the resurrection is the comment on the life which preceded it; it is the illumination of words spoken, deeds done, and sufferings borne. But, dear brethren, our thoughts run past these weighty considerations to the sacred *Person* Himself. We are ready to leave all prospects of life and happiness on one side, to welcome from the tomb the Friend of Sinners. "I am He that liveth." Oh, word of joy! The raptures of our hearts know no bound—*Jesus lives.*

II. **We further observe that henceforth the Living Christ is the object of our faith.**—Having been buried with Him in death, we rise with Him into newness of life. But to rise into fellowship with the Living Christ, our faith must soar above the mere belief in historical Christianity. This sublime condition of fellowship implies association in thought with the risen Saviour. The person of Christ, not in form, but in fact, must engage our heart. Purity of thought, concentration of thought, and intensity of thought, alone can lead us to the living association with Jesus. The faith of the believer receives its strongest impetus from the fact that He who was dead is now alive. It imparts to the gospel its higher degree of life. Bodily presence we cannot have, neither do we realise each other's love and service by presence always. Bodily presence creates mental absence. The Christ of the Resurrection became more real to the disciples than the Christ of the Crucifixion. Thomas believed because He saw, but "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." The Christian must realise more the power of faith. That faith increases in power as he lives near the Living Christ. Stand by the cross, and your faith works within a definite circle; but stand by the Risen Lord, and faith touches no circumference. The gospel, re-enacted in the heart and life, is our work. His marvellous teaching must speak to us with a living lip. We must lay hold of His hand to keep pace with His example. The power to destroy sin comes from fellowship with His sufferings. If we are compelled to go from the cross to the tomb, we need not linger there long, for He is in the upper room. Then we journey with Him to Emmaus, that He may open to us the Scriptures, and kindle the fire of His love within our breast. In Galilee also we receive our commission to work out life's plan. Lastly, He is gone within the veil. The King of Glory has triumphantly entered, and is seated at the Father's right hand. Will He think of us again? Hark to the sound of holy voices, singing His praise! See the golden crowns which are cast at His feet in honour of His person! Will He think of us again? Yes, oh, yes! He ever liveth to make intercession for us. The delightful life of daily and hourly communion with our living Saviour cannot be enjoyed by a mere contemplation of the fact that He is risen. The Holy Spirit is the true revealer of the Spiritual Christ. This truth was distinctly taught to the Church by the Saviour. We may have a very sincere desire to have the presence of Christ with us daily, but that blessing can only come through the Holy Ghost. The Spirit gives us the sight of the risen Lord. We cannot now hear Him speak except we have the ear circumcised by the Spirit. Heaven is far away from earth; He who fills the space between is the Spirit of God.

"Spirit of purity and grace,
Our weakness, pitying, see;
Oh, make our hearts Thy dwelling place,
And worthy Thee."

III. **And, lastly, we observe that the resurrection of Christ is the open door of immortality.**—"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept." These are the words with which we seek to succour the hearts of the bereaved. They are words of comfort in the deepest sorrow. The resurrection of

the Lord shows that life is more than the animation of the organism of the brain. As animation moves the material form, so does life wear animation as a garment. But under it all is the living spirit. We are now unable to speak of the body that shall be: we are content with the promise that it will resemble His glorious body. The most astonishing words ever uttered by human lips are these: "I am the Resurrection and the Life." Those who are in Christ are in life. The vision which was given to Hosea represents the Saviour at the gates of *Hades*, demanding the release of the prisoners: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death; O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction; repentance shall be hid from Mine eyes.'" He has taken the keys of helan from the hands of Pluto, and has opened the gates of the dark world. The first thought which engrosses our mind is the release of those who have entered from our side. To the aged there are many. Some of them are very near to our hearts. See the Risen Saviour standing at their grave, as He stood at the grave of Lazarus, saying, "Come forth." Blessed thought: we shall see them again. Then comes the other thought, that we must soon enter the valley of death. It will not be long ere these bodies will lie in their graves, when the shades of death will hide from us everything earthly. His resurrection will throw light on the other side. Think for a moment of the glorious sight which the resurrection of Jesus suggests, when, in the last day, He will turn the key to open millions of graves. To-day the churchyard is the quiet resting place of many—the most peaceful spot on earth. But the day will come when the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised, incorruptible. We fear not death, for we have witnessed the death of Jesus; we dread not the grave, for we have been at the grave of Jesus. There is a resurrection into spiritual life, before the body can come up from the grave, fashioned after the body of His Glory.

"It is not death to fling
Aside this mortal dust,
And rise, on strong, exulting wing,
To live among the just."

—"*Weekly Pulpit.*"

Easter Joy.—The Easter season is a time of great joy for all the children of God. 1. They rejoice on account of the completeness of the work of salvation. For when Christ had risen from the dead, He thereby had fully paid the wages of sin. God has accepted the death of His Son in the place of our death, and therefore has given us life. 2. All Christians rejoice on account of the excellent witnesses and testimonies concerning the resurrection of Christ. He appeared no fewer than ten different times after His resurrection, and on one occasion was seen of five hundred (1 Cor. xv. 5). He conversed and ate with His disciples alone (Acts x. 41). He permitted Himself to be touched by them (John xx. 25; 1 John i. 1). Evidence of this kind admits of no contradiction. Even now He still furnishes the proof that He is alive by living in us (Gal. ii. 20). 3. Christians rejoice in Easter because they have been given the seal and security of the gracious forgiveness of sins, of peace with God, so that they can, without fear, approach God, and know that He will come to them. 4. Christians rejoice because the resurrection of Christ is for them a comfort in death. Christ has sweetened death for the believers, has sanctified the grave, and they, too, shall enter into eternal life. 5. Christians, for these reasons, make it a special point to celebrate Easter-day by rejoicings of the heart, by meditation and prayer, and contemplation of the great things which God has done for them. 6. They strive daily to rise from the dead spiritually, to throw aside sin and evil deeds, and sanctify their lives to the service of God.—*G. H. Schodde, Ph. D.*

Symbol of the Keys.—As to *keys*, and

the associated idea of *unlocking*, one need but compare Ps. ix. 13; Isa. xxxviii. 10; Matt. xvi. 18, in order to see that the Hebrews ascribed to the underworld or region of the dead *doors* or *gates*—imagery borrowed from the doors of sepulchres. In like manner the great Abyss has doors to be unlocked (Rev. ix. 1, xx. 1-3). The Rabbins say that God has reserved four keys to Himself, which He has not committed to any of the angels—viz., the key of rain, of aliment, of the sepulchre, and of parturiency. Wetstein has many citations which show how common this sentiment was among them. If it were prevalent when the Apocalypse was written, and John had any respect to it in the passage before us, it would furnish another particular in which he ascribes to the Saviour the prerogatives of the Godhead.—*Moses Stuart.*

The Living Lord.—The Isle of Patmos is of undying interest to the Christian Church. Yet it is not the kind of interest that makes us want to visit the lonely place. Perhaps we should understand the book of Revelation better if we could study it among the very scenes that helped to give tone and shape to the writer's imaginations. Patmos is a rocky and bare island of the Ægean Sea. On account of its stern and desolate character it was used under the Roman empire as a place of banishment. "As the coast is approached from the sea, it is found to be high and comprising many promontories and bays, which give to the whole a very irregular appearance. The only port that is used is a deep bay, sheltered by high mountains on every side but one, where it is protected by a projecting cape. Above the landing place is a small village, comprising about fifty habitations, and situated on the edge of a vast crater, sloping off on either side, like the roof of a tiled house." The famous grotto, or cavern, where the apostle is said to have written the book of Revelation, is situated on the face of the hill about half-way between the town and the port. A traveller helps us to realise the scene on which the banished apostle must often have gazed. "The time when the island appears in its best position is during the rising and setting of the sun. Whether viewed in dim perspective, through grey and silvery mists, or amidst hues of liveliest purple, the isles and continent of Greece present their varied features, which neither pen nor pencil can adequately portray. Picture an evening sun, behind the towering cliffs of Patmos, gilding the battlements of the monastery of the Apocalypse with its parting rays—the island, surrounded by inexpressible brightness, seeming to float upon an abyss of fire, while the moon, in milder splendour, is rising full over the opposite expanse." A poetic soul could not fail to be affected by the influence of such surroundings. To the lonely man came wonderful visions, weird as ever were given to the prophets of the olden time. But the first, the introductory vision, which was the key to all the rest, was the vision of the Risen, Living, Glorified, Present-working Master and Lord, whose name John loved to bear, and for whose sake John was then a banished and persecuted man. Then, and always, the key to everything is fuller apprehension of the person and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. One thing above all others we desire, even as did the apostle Paul before us: that we may "know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings." *We* must know Him in the exercise of Christian thought. St. John knew Him with the aid of suggestive symbolic representations. But what he came to know we can learn from him; and it was this: Christ bears present and saving relations to men through all the progress of human history. Jesus lives. He has come again to the world. He is in the world. He is adequately endowed for the conflict with evil. He is living Saviour; Captain of salvation. The text is a part of Christ's own explanation of the symbols in

which He had presented Himself to the beloved St. John. We notice—

I. **The mystery behind Christ.**—"Was dead." This is the assertion of a *fact* which carries the profoundest significance with it. It brings to mind the most wonderful event that ever occurred in human history. Not most wonderful, even, as the death of an *innocent* man by torturing crucifixion, but most wonderful as the submission to human death of one who was the Son of God, with power. It is not only an historical fact, it is a cherished memory that is full of gracious influence. Thoughtful souls are never made so gentle, so tender, as when they meditate in full view of Him who died. But why, when Christ is showing Himself as the Living One, does He recall His death? It must have been to call back to St. John's mind His veritable humanity. Nothing stamps a man as a man more than the fact that he will have to die; "there is no discharge from that war." We know Jesus Christ was a real brother-man, for *He died*. It was also necessary for Christ to qualify the glorious vision in which He appeared to St. John, or it might so absorb his attention as to keep away from his thought the competency of Christ for the work which He had to do as the Living One. He who died must have passed through a life before He died, and so He must have gained actual and full experience of our human needs and sorrows, and must be able to succour the tempted, and to redeem His Church from all evil, seeing "He was in all points tempted like as we are." But the place taken by Christ's death in His own representation of Himself needs our special notice. He does not put the death *first*. The greatest, and most important, of all truths for His Church is this: "I am He that *liveth*." The second truth is: "I *was dead*." The apostle Paul apprehended the same relative position of the two truths when he wrote, "It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Only as we set these two truths in their right relations can we apprehend one of the deeper meanings of Christ's death. It was the experience, and the obedience, through which He gained both the *right* and the *fitness* to be the "bringer-on of sons unto glory." For that work He was "*made perfect* through suffering." Gaining His fitness to be the ever-living Saviour lights up the deeper meanings of the life of Christ as well as of His death. It helps us to understand that salvation is *His personal work*. It is only a part of the truth to say, "He *has* saved us"; the rest of the truth is this: "He *is* saving us." "He is able to save unto the uttermost." His healings of the sick, and lame, and leprous, when He dwelt among men, and "wore earth about Him," do but show what He can now do in souls. He is "alive for evermore," and we can come to Him, soul-blind, soul-lame, and receive, direct from Him, healing and life.

II. **The glory in Christ.**—"He that liveth." "Am alive for evermore." This is no mere assertion of His resurrection from the dead. It is the declaration, "I am the living One." As in the days of His flesh, our Lord affirmed that "He had life in Himself." He *was* "the Life." In Christ's continuous, eternal life, that human death was only an episode. "When death came to Him, it was seen to be, not the end of life, but only an event in life. It did not close His being, but it was only an experience which that being underwent. That spiritual existence which had been going on for ever, on which the short existences of men had been strung into consistency, now came and submitted itself to that which men had always been submitting to. And lo! instead of being what men feared it was, what men had hardly dared to hope that it was not—the putting out of life—it was seen to be only the changing of the circumstances of life, without any power over the real principle of life—any more power than the cloud has over the sun that it obscures, or than the ocean has

over the bubble of air that it buries fathoms deep, but whose buoyant nature it cannot destroy, nor hinder it from struggling towards, and sometimes reaching to, the surface of the watery mass that covers it. That was the wonder of Christ's death. He passed into it for love of us. And as He came out from it, He declared its nature. It is an experience of life, not an end of life. Life goes on through it and comes out unharmed." This is shown us in the vision of Him who "liveth, and was dead." But to St. John's mind that visioned Figure might seem to be an appearance only, a symbol, a picture-teaching. He must learn that it was but the garment, the setting, the manifestation of a *real, living Being*; only figured in this way in order to help St. John, and us, to realise what Jesus Christ still is, and what are the relations in which He still stands to His Church, and what is the work that He still has to do, in the Church, and in the world. And is not this truth, that Christ is the "Living Saviour," a new revelation, even *to us*? So strangely Christian doctrine strives to gather our supreme interest about our Saviour's death; and once a year we break loose to glory in the Risen and Living Christ of the Easter memories. Christian doubts and fears too often cling about the Saviour dead, and we cannot rise into the heaven of our hope in the Living One, and sing away our fears. And sometimes our strange Christian infirmities even make us *wish* Him dead; for we do not want a Saviour who is actually working now, cleansing now, finding out the sin-stains in His people, washing them away, and seeking to make His people "whiter than snow." So it is the ever-new gospel we need to hear again to-day: Jesus lives. More than all He was to His disciples, in the days of His flesh, He is to us. His relations to them were really *spiritual* relations, but they were illustrated for them by actual bodily associations. His relations with us are *spiritual* relations, and they are illustrated for us in the records of His human life with His disciples. If we can enter into the inner mysteries, then we say, Christ has come again, even as He promised. Indeed, He never really went away. He only passed out of sense apprehensions. He is *here*: free from bodily limitations; His name is still "Emmanuel Jesus," "God with us," *saving us*—not "who has saved us"—"from our sins."

III. **The present mission of Christ.**—"Have the keys of hell and of death." I need not explain that "hell" here is really "Hades," the resting place of disembodied spirits; nor need I tell you more than that the "keys" are the symbol of authority. The steward in possession goes about with the keys hanging from his shoulder, as the sign of his office. But it cannot surely be the present glory of Christ, that He has merely to open the gates of death, and rule the spirits in Hades? This is teaching by figure and symbol. Just as leprosy is taken as the type of all diseases, so "death and hell" stand as types of *all the forces* that resist the progress of Christian life in the individual, and the extension of Christ's Church. "Death" stands as the representative of all the material forces; "Hades" stands as the representative of all the immaterial, unseen, spiritual forces; for we wrestle against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." When we see "death and hell" standing for all the material and spiritual oppositions to the progress of Christ's Church, we begin to understand why Christ was figured to St. John as the "infinitely white One," who *is* white, and liveth to *make white*. The full figure is given in the first chapter, as bearing relation to the whole Church, and its entire circle of needs. And then Christ is visioned in parts, those sides of Christ's living power being chosen which bear direct relation to each of the Seven Churches—to the weaknesses, the sins, and the perils, of each. This is the truth shining forth from our text: the White Christ

is alive, and is working to make His Church white, as He is white. Are you a seeker for salvation? See! Christ liveth, and can save you. Are you a Christian, battling with sin! See! you do not struggle alone; Christ is with you in the fight. Are you a Christian in the world of peril and temptation? See! the Hebrew youths were safe, even in the fire, when one was with them like unto the Son of God. To the Church, groaning under the burdens of her disability we say, Let her arise, shake herself from the dust, and win her victories, for her Lord *lives*, He "is alive for evermore."

Resurrection in Retrospect.—The true explanation of the extreme distress and perplexity of our Lord's disciples lies in this: the resurrection of Christ they could not understand, they could not believe. And this condition of mind continued till the event actually took place. But what a difference there is between resurrection in prospect and resurrection in retrospect! No change in any recorded history or any known biography is more startling. The whole mind of the Christian disciples, in reference to the resurrection of their Lord, is suddenly transfigured, and that which they looked forward to dimly, timidly, unwillingly, they now look back upon with undoubting and exulting confidence. It has been said—1. That there was a *fraud*: Christ did not really rise, but His disciples practised a deception. But falsehood in one thing does not fit a truthful and genuine religion; and falsehood does not make men brave. 2. That the death of Christ was an *imaginary death*. But Christ prophesied and expected His death; and the physical conditions narrated involve actual death. 3. The belief in the resurrection was the result of a *waking dream*. But there is no conceivable basis for any such idea in the record. We cannot separate the thought of our own resurrection from the thought of that rising of Christ; nor ought we to separate them. At present our resurrection is *in prospect*, and we know not what it will be. But it will not be so always. The time will come when all will be behind us—when all the past will be clearly known and well remembered. Then it will be resurrection *in retrospect*. We shall look back on the life we led here. This we know as to the future, that if we are true Christians we shall then be with Him "who liveth, and was dead, and is alive for evermore"; and "because He liveth, we shall live also." —*Dean Howson.*

The Keys of Hell and of Death.

I. **The keys symbolise sovereignty.** —And the sovereignty referred to is in the hands of Christ. He is the Everlasting One who was dead and is alive again for evermore. Upon Christ's head "are many crowns"; in Him are vested many sovereignties. Nature is His, for He made it. Mind is His, for He created it. Angels are His, for they worship Him. Men are His, for He redeemed them. The Church is His, for He purchased it with His own blood. And over *all* is He the Supreme Ruler. There is not an atom or a force of nature; not a form or function of life; not a type or order of intelligence; not a nation or grade of moral being; not a condition or circumstance of existence;—over which His throne flings not its shadow or shelter. It is of the sovereignty of this ascended, triumphant, glorified, and enthroned Jesus that the Spirit speaks in this sublime portion of Holy Writ. Here you have the range of His Kingship; the province of His empire; the process of His government; the antagonisms with which He wrestles; the methods by which He puts down all rule and authority—curbs the rage of men, confounds the schemes of hell, rolls back the swelling billows of error and vice, conserves the truth, enshields His Church, and finally sits enthroned upon the homage, reverence, and love, of a redeemed and glorified humanity! Among the antagonisms of that humanity, death, in form most

hideous; death, with its most terrific symbols and enginery; death, with its cruel mockings;—threatens to extinguish the race. Christ knows and feels all this. And that there might not be a moment's misgiving or shadow of anxiety, He reveals Himself, clothed in attributes and belted with potencies which qualify Him for all the emergencies which await the Church of the future, till time shall be no longer. He knows her, for He ever walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks. Her members droop and die; He is alive for evermore. Her foes wield the dread sceptre of destruction, but *they* know not that it is under Him, and because of His permission, and subject to His control, that they waste and lay low the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts; for "*He* has the keys of hell and of death."

II. **Christ is sovereign of death.**—"He has the keys of . . . death." That death is not an outlaw we might anticipate, seeing that there is nothing around us not subject to law. Life, in all its beauties, melodies, and beatitudes, is everywhere and always under law. Shall it be that such an agency as death shall act defiant of law? When we remember the agonies which it can extract; the energies which it can paralyse; the hopes which it can blast; the homes which it can disrupt and desolate: how it can revel in ruin and banquet upon groans, and quaff the chalice filled with tears wrung from poor widows' and orphans' hearts; how, with dread might, it can strew earth with the wreck and spoil of noble manhood and cultured womanhood; how, in a moment, the result of long, long years of the training of character for the highest service of humanity can be frustrated;—then we ask again, "Is death an exception to the general fact that *law* prevails throughout God's universe?" Can it be that such a monster is loose, with no hook in his jaw and no bridle to his power? Does not He, who guides Arcturus, wheels the comet, rides upon the whirlwind, rims in old Ocean, chains the fire-fiend, enkindles and extinguishes the volcano; who bids the seasons from their palaces in the heavens march forth to fling their treasures over the habitable earth;—does not He control and order this overshadowing hierarchy of death? Yes! thanks to His ever-blessed name, "*He* has the keys . . . of death!" He is King of kings, and the "King of Terrors" is but a vassal prince, without right of independent sovereignty, and altogether subject to Him who *in His own person* conquered death and the grave. He opens the gates of death and no man shuts. He shuts and no man opens. No saint or servant of His can die, but as He permits it. Not a foothold is there for *Chance*. Within the domain of death, unknown to Him, the grave cannot seize another victim. No march of spoliation can death steal upon the hosts of God's elect. Their Captain is all-vigilant, and, should the unauthorised arrow fly, His shield shall turn and shiver it. "He has the keys of death."

III. **He has also the keys of Hell.**—"Hell," or Hades, here refers to the invisible world of spirits. The sovereignty of this invisible world owns Christ's sceptre. It is *within His empire*. Who dare compute the myriads on myriads congregated there! And they are all there *living!* "All *live* unto Him."—*J. O. Peck, D.D.*

Ver. 20. *Holding the Stars.*—The hand that holds the seven stars is as loving as the hand that was laid in blessing upon the little children. The face that is as the sun shining in its strength beams with as much love as when it drew publicans and harlots to His feet. The breast that is girt with the golden girdle is the same breast upon which John leaned his happy head.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

The Angels of the Churches.—This title appears to have been borne by the ministers of the synagogues among the Jews. The business of this officer,

who was always called a bishop of the congregation, was to offer prayers for the whole assembly, to which the people answered, "Amen," and to preach, if there were no other to discharge that office. The reading of the law was not properly his business, but every Sabbath he called out seven of the synagogue, and on other days fewer, to perform that duty. The angel stood by the person that read, to correct him if he read improperly. He took care also that worship was performed without disorder and with all regularity. By a name probably borrowed from the synagogue the bishops and pastors of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor are termed the "angels" of the Churches. It is very reasonable to suppose that Paul alludes to this name when he says that women ought to be covered before the angels (1 Cor. xi. 10). Bishops, or ministers of Christian Churches, are often called "angels" by the earlier writers. It is, however, better to regard the angel of the Church as the ideal embodiment (so to speak) of the Church, rather than any particular official. "The angel of the Church would be the spiritual personification of the Church—the Church, seen in its heavenly representative, and seen, therefore, in the light of those splendid possibilities which are hers if she holds fast by Him who holds the seven stars.

The General Idea of the Picture of the Seven Churches.—It contains the portraiture of all the shades and, in a manner, the statistics of all the spiritual states, either of good or evil, in which Christianity on earth may find itself. The Lord chose, in order to characterise these seven degrees, the Churches of the country in which John lived, which embodied most perfectly these seven types. The number *seven* indicates here, as it always does, a totality. But the idea of the book is that of a *simultaneous*, not that of a *successive*, totality, as those think who see in these seven Churches the portraiture of the principal phases of the history of the Church. One may, doubtless, by taking up this latter standpoint, succeed in bringing out some ingeniously conceived points of harmony, but they always have a somewhat arbitrary character. Besides, the subject itself of this first part is against such an interpretation. It is the *starting point* of the Lord's progress which should be here indicated; this starting point is the state of the Church at the time of the vision, and not the unrolling of its future history, which is contained rather in the subsequent visions.—*F. Godet, D.D.*

The Universal Church.—We are introduced, in chaps. ii., iii., to the Universal Church under the presentation given of seven Churches of Asia selected for that purpose. These Churches are so selected that they present us with a picture of the various elements that make up the Church's life. We see her in herself and in her relation to the world; in her strength and in her weakness; in her steadfastness and in her declensions; in her prosperity and in her sufferings; in her outward poverty and in her true riches; in the distinction existing between the real and nominal followers of Christ within her borders; in the just indignation of her Supreme Head against the one, and in His leading the other to the full possession of His own triumph in the presence of His Father and their Father, of His God and their God.—*W. Milligan, D.D.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1 *A Legend about John.*—The following is narrated by John Cassian, a hermit of the fifth century, and it is also told by St. Anthony and others. In his old age the apostle used to find pleasure in the attachment of a bird which he had tamed—a partridge. One day, as he held it in his bosom, and was gently stroking it, a huntsman suddenly approached, and, wondering that one so illustrious should take such a

trivial amusement, he asked, "Art thou that John whose singular renown has inspired even me with a great desire to know thee? How, then, canst thou occupy thyself with an employment so humble?" The apostle replied, "What is that in thy hand?" He answered, "A bow." "And why dost thou not always carry it bent?" "Because," he answered, "it would in that case lose its strength; and when it was necessary to shoot, it would fail, from the too continuous strain." "Then let not this slight and brief relaxation of mine, O young man, perplex thee," answered the apostle; "since without it the spirit would flag from the unremitted strain, and fail when the call of duty came." —*Biblical Things.*

Ver. 8. *Alpha and Omega.*—It would be both more correct and expressive to render this sentence, "I am *the* Alpha and *the* Omega." In the Early Church these two letters came to be frequently used as symbols of Christ. Sometimes the letters were suspended from the upper arms of St. Andrew's cross. Very many works of Christian antiquity were adorned with them. They were also worn on rings and seals, frequently in the form of a monogram. Shortly after the death of Constantine (A.D. 337) the letters were stamped on the current coin of the Roman Empire. The use of the symbol in the primitive Church amounted to a quotation of Rev. xxii. 13, and was regarded as a confession of faith in Christ's own assertion of His infinite and Divine nature. The Arians, who denied the divinity of Christ, avoided the employment of the symbol, but after the outbreak of that heresy its use became almost universal among the orthodox. It is worthy of remark that Alpha is once used by an ancient writer in the same sense as our A1.

Ver. 11. *The word "Church."*—St. John addresses his message to certain symbols or signs that were shown him in the vision when he was "in the spirit." They were "seven churches." The Greek word *ecclesia* is frequently translated by the English word *church*. It is not properly *church*, for *church* is an Anglicised term derived from a different Greek word, *curiacon*, which means *the Lord's place* (or *house*). *Ecclesia* means originally *a summoned assembly*. An assembly, so called, was made up (if a quorum attended), held, and dissolved. In the New Testament, so far as affects this book, it seems to mean a body of people who have been invited, by an ordained apostle, presbyter, or householder, to worship God together in convenient places of meeting, and have accepted and acted upon the invitation. *Ecclesia*, not *church*, has a more spiritual meaning in Eph. i. 22, 23; Col. i. 18. In these passages it includes all those who form the body of which Christ is the head, such as are elsewhere described as "*called* by God" to various duties and graces. In the Book of Revelation this latter sense of *ecclesia* is never used. If referred to at all, it can only be symbolically, but the more spiritual meaning need not be introduced. The English word *church* means an ecclesiastical building, and, metaphorically, all its "connection"—*i.e.*, the baptized members of the Christian body who use it for worship. The word *congregation* means an assembly, and cannot properly be used to mean the "connection," as a limitation to the baptized, either metaphorically or otherwise.

Ver. 18. *The Classical Idea of "Hades."*—The Greek word "Hades" in the New Testament, and the Hebrew word "Sheol" in the Old Testament, are used in the most general sense to denote the state of the dead, including the grave as the residence of the body, and the world of spirits as the abode of the soul. The Hebrew idea of it is perhaps most fully given in Job x. 21, 22. But it may be interesting to compare the pagan notion from which the word "Hades" is taken. The name was given by the ancient Greeks and Romans, and especially by the poets, to Pluto, the god who was supposed to preside over the infernal regions. He is represented as being the son of Chronos and Rhea, the husband of Persephone, and the brother of Zeus and Poseidon. He bore the character of being a fierce, cruel, and inexorable tyrant, dreaded by mortals, who, when they invoked him, struck the earth with their hands, sacrificed black sheep in his honour, and in offering their sacrifices stood with averted faces. The grim Hades shuts up the shades of the dead in his dark domains. His wife Persephone shared the throne of the lower world with her cruel husband. And not only did Hades rule over infernal regions; he was considered also as the author of those blessings which spring from the earth, and more especially of those rich mineral treasures which are contained in the bowels of the earth.

CHAPTER II.

REVELATIONS OF CHURCH LIFE.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

VER. 1. **Angel.**—If this be taken as the chief pastor of the Church, it is quite possible that Timothy is the person addressed. **Holdeth.**—As a figure for exercising dominion over, having power over. **Walketh.**—Is present among Christian societies and exercises particular inspection over them. Ephesus is first addressed, as the chief city of the district.

Ver. 2. **I know.**—Often used to denote approbation or complacency. **Works.**—Perhaps "all developments of character," but better treated as a general term, which is explained as embracing "labour" (strain) and "patience." The word "labour" here means "labour carried on unto weariness." "Patience" here expresses the brave and persistent endurance of the Christian. **Canst not bear.**—Or cannot do with; cannot put up with. **Evil.**—κακούς Evil ones. Perhaps the morally evil were specially in mind. **Found them liars.**—For St. Paul's warning of false teachers, see Acts xx. 28-31. *Tried* is a strong word. Thoroughly tested their pretensions. **Apostles.**—Involving claim to direct Divine authority. They were probably Judaisers, either of the antinomian or the Gnostic type. The word translated "liars" is ψευδεῖς—false. They who made false claims would be sure to teach false things. They could be tested (1) by comparing their teachings with those of St. Paul; (2) by recalling the characteristic features of heretical doctrine, as described by him; and (3) by the moral and spiritual influence which their teachings were found to exert.

Ver. 3. **Not fainted.**—Or, not been wearied out, though the strain has been long continued. See the word translated "labour" in ver. 2. "They had toiled on to very weariness, without wearying of their toil."

Ver. 4. **Left.**—Let go. "I have it against thee that thou givest up the love thou hadst at the beginning." The first love may be (1) their first fervour of love to Christ; or (2) their former spirit of benevolence and kindness toward all men. *Stuart* inclines to the second explanation. *Plumptre* says: "Whether the 'first love' is that which has God, or Christ, or man, for its object, I am not careful to enquire, for the true temper of love or charity includes all three."

Ver. 5. **Fallen.**—The height of Christian attainment gained has to be maintained. To be satisfied with a lower level is to fall. **Do the first works.**—This is possible at once. To restore the feeling may not be possible at once; but resuming the *works* puts us in the way of the restoration of the feeling. **Or else.**—Lit. "but if not." **Will come.**—Am coming. **Remove thy candlestick.**—A providential and spiritual visitation of Christ is meant. "The judgment threatened was determined by the symbolism of the vision. The lamp was not burning brightly. If it were rekindled and trimmed and fed with oil, well. If not, there would come on it the sentence which falls on all unfaithfulness, and the lamp should be removed. The Church which had not let its light shine before men would lose even its outward form and polity, and be as though it had never been" (*Plumptre*). A few huts only remain on the site of ancient Ephesus.

Ver. 6. **Nicolaitanes.**—A branch of the Gnostics who held it to be lawful to eat meats offered to idols, and who practised fornication. They traced their origin to Nicolas, one of the seven deacons, but there is no clue to the assumed connection between them. They were the antinomians of the Asiatic Church. Some think the word is but a Greek form of the name Balaam, or as symbolical of Balaam, and so Nicolaitanes was equivalent to Balaamites.

Ver. 7 **The Spirit.**—τὸ πνεῦμα. Yet the Living Christ is the speaker throughout. "The mode of transmission to the Churches is, however, by the Spirit, in His dispensation, 'giving utterance' to John." Remember, however, that to Christ's human nature the Spirit was imparted *without measure*. **Tree of life.**—Figurative description of eternal life (see Gen. ii. 9). "The promise of the tree of life is appropriate (1) to the virtue commended: those who had not indulged in the license of the Nicolaitanes shall eat of the tree of life; (2) to the special weakness of the Ephesians: to those who had fallen and lost the paradise of first loving communion and fellowship with God is held out the promise of a restored paradise, and participation in the tree of life" (*Bishop Boyd Carpenter*).

Ver. 8. **Was dead and lived again** (R.V.).—Both the death and the return to life are assigned to a past time. The appropriateness of this presentation of Christ lies in the fact that the epistle was addressed to a persecuted Church, exposed even to the peril of martyrdom. They, even as their Lord, might have to go "through death to life.'

Ver. 9. **Works.**—Omitted in R.V. **Tribulation.**—*Trench* explains the origin of this word ("Study of Words," p. 8). **Poverty.**—Attendant on the persecution. When turned out of the synagogue, on becoming Christians, Jews were often deprived of their property. **Rich.**—In character, and Divine approval. **Blasphemy.**—A term usually and properly applied to God; here meaning "reviling," "insult," "calumny." **Synagogue of Satan.**—With simple meaning of congregation of deceivers. "A company of people bearing the image of Satan, copying his example, doing his work, and supporters of his rule." Here Satan is treated as the ideal deceiver, who represents these deceivers. No argument in relation to his personality can safely be drawn from such figurative expressions as these.

Ver. 10. **Devil.**—Representing the informers against, accusers of, the Christians, and persecuting magistrates. **Prison.**—The first degree of punishment. **Tried.**—In the sense of tempted to apostatise. **Ten days.**—Not literal ten days; the expression is figurative, and means a strictly limited and relatively short time. **Faithful.**—Constant, persistent. **Death.**—*θανάτου* suggests here a violent death. **Crown of life.**—*I.e.*, eternal life as a crown, or sealing of the faithfulness. See 1 Pet. v. 4; 2 Tim. iv. 8.

Ver. 11. **Second death.**—Compare chap. xx. 6, 14, xxi. 8. It points to a death other than the death of the body. It is used in the Chaldee paraphrase. *Carpenter* says: "The life of the spirit is the knowledge of God (John xvii. 3); the death of the spirit, or the second death, is the decay or paralysis of the powers by which such a knowledge was possible, and the experience of the awfulness of a life which is without God."

Ver. 12. **Sharp sword.**—Suggesting unusual severity of asserting, and unusual severity of dealing (see chap. i. 16; also Eph. vi. 17). "On the one hand, it was to smite that it might heal, cutting to the quick, reaching the conscience, laying bare the hidden depths of each man's life. On the other, it was also quick and powerful to smite and to destroy.

Ver. 13. **Thy works.**—Better omitted, as in ver. 9. **Satan's seat.**—Or "throne." Reference may be to the worship of Æsculapius, under the symbol of a serpent; but *Sinclair*, on the ground of recent excavations, gives the suggestion that the phrase refers to the great altar of Zeus Soter, carved with the wars of gods and giants, which Attalus set up to commemorate his victory over the Gauls—the last great triumph of Hellenism over barbarism. Another suggestion is, that the phrase merely indicates that Pergamos was, in a special sense, a home of the Satanic spirit of persecution. It may be better, however, to keep the idea of *deceiver* associated with the term "Satan," and *destroyer* associated with the word "Devil." **Antipas.**—Probably short for Antipater; a man not otherwise known. **Martyr.**—Strictly witness; but bearing witness unto death. The death of one of them reveals the severity of the persecution under which all passed. (The legend concerning Antipas cannot be traced earlier than the fifth century, and then legends of martyrs were freely invented.)

Ver. 14. **Doctrine of Balaam.**—Which was this: if you cannot get your own way by open disobedience to God, get it by scheming; get it through offering gratification to human passion. Nothing can be baser, or more demoralising, than this "doctrine of Balaam." "Israel could not be cursed, but they might be made to bring a curse upon themselves by yielding to sin."

Ver. 15. **Nicolaitanes.**—These people encouraged Christians to join in the idolatrous feasts of their neighbours, on the plea that to the spiritual man there can be no sin in any merely bodily, animal action. It is true that sin is in the will, but it is known by its expression in acts. **I hate.**—*ὁ μισῶ.* Probably should be *ὁμοίως*, in like manner.

Ver. 16. **Repent.**—Addressed either directly to the angel or to the loyal ones in the Church. **Them.**—Those members who are yielding to surrounding evil influences. The discipline must be severe on them, and an anxiety for the whole Church.

Ver. 17. **Hidden manna.**—Figure for the Divinely-provided, spiritual food, with which loyal souls are nourished. **White stone.**—Sign of acquittal. See in "Main Homiletic" account of the "*tessara hospitalis*," which explains the secrecy and value of the new name written upon the stone. **New name.**—That which betokens their adoption into the family of God; a new character, new position and privileges."

Ver. 18. **Thyatira.**—Situated between Pergamos and Sardis. Inscriptions show that it contained many corporate guilds, one being that of the dyers. Apollo was specially worshipped, as the sun-god, under the Macedonian name of Tyrinnas. **Son of God.**—This name solemnly affirms His Divine *power*, as well as right, and prepares for the promised bestowment of power, in ver. 26. **Eyes.**—A figure representing His omniscience, and especially the intensity of its searching. **Feet.**—Figure representing the firmness of His tread who comes in judgment. Feet of *Chalcolibanus.* An aspect of stern sovereignty marks this epistle.

Ver. 19. **Works.**—Divided into two sets—active: charity and service; passive: faith and patience. Ephesus had failed in the second set? this Church was stronger in the second than in the first. It would seem that on the passive side they were even weak; permitting things that put them in peril.

Ver. 20. **Woman Jezebel.**—More exactly, "thy wife Jezebel." Probably a party in the Church is referred to which was led by an unscrupulous woman. It is necessary to

remember that traditions had grown up around the person of Jezebel, and these, rather than the actual history, are referred to. **Seduce my servants.**—The teachings of St. Paul show how liberty in sensual indulgence, in its two forms, was a cause of constant anxiety in the Early Churches.

Ver. 22. **Bed.**—Of sickness and suffering. The figure is in keeping with the sin, and suggests a fitting and answering punishment.

Ver. 23. **Children.**—Her disciples; those who take up with her teachings, and follow her ways. **Death.**—In forms that would clearly indicate Divine judgment.

Ver. 24. **Deep things.**—Probably these heretical teachers boasted of knowing the *deep things of God*, so they are satirised as the *deep things of Satan*. **Other burden.**—See Acts xv. 28, *seqq*.

Ver. 26. **My works.**—Not the works of any self-willed teacher. There must be simple and supreme loyalty to Christ, and that involves loyalty to everything that is self-restrained and pure. Christ gives power over *self* and *sin*. **Over the nations.**—This is a figure of speech. The individual triumph over all individual and all combined immoral forces and influences is pictured as a rule over riotous and violent nations (Compare Ps. ii.). "Those who, like their Master, refused to win power by doing homage to wrong (Matt. iv. 3-10), would share the nobler sway which He now established." **Morning star.**—Used of Christ Himself in chap. xxii. 16. "The symbol of sovereignty on its brighter and more benignant side, and therefore the fitting and necessary complement of the dread attributes that had gone before."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—7.

A Church Weak in the Springs of Life.—We are treating the book of Revelation as a spiritual rather than as a historical book. Not anxious to fit it to any history, or to find events that seem to match its symbols, but purposing to find what suggestive spiritual and practical applications can be made of the symbols. In this and the following chapter is the picture of the Living Christ, the searching White Christ, moving among His Churches, carefully inspecting them. And what He notices, and remarks on, in these seven representative cases, may help us to discover what, in the Churches of to-day, must be grieving Him who would have them white as He is white.

I. **The Living Christ accepts the fact that His Church on earth is a fighting Church.** (Compare St. Paul's address to the elders of Ephesus, Acts xx. 28-30.) That the enemies of the Church are mainly within itself is seen in all these seven cases. The chief wrong is always some wrong in themselves. Outside evils and temptations are easily over-mastered when the internal spiritual health and vitality are well maintained. The Living Christ is not content with surface impressions; He goes to the very root of the evil. He sees—1. *Inconsistency*—the failure to harmonise spirit and conduct. 2. *Inefficiency*—the failure to rise to a high standard of Christian life, or to meet the higher spiritual obligations. 3. *Influence of false teachers*, regarded rather as the source of moral than of merely intellectual mischief. The conflict of Christ's Church must partly be with circumstances and with persecutors; but the real importance of their influence lies in the strain put on Christian *motive*, and the injury done to Christian character. Christ does not expect present perfection in His Church. He does expect "overcoming," which is the pursuit, step by step, of perfection—steady progress, by advancing triumphs, towards perfection. Christian life should be a series of victories, small and great.

II. **The Living Christ may notice a wavering, changeable spirit in a Church.**—This is the point of importance in the inspection of this Church. The Searching Lord found out that they were not actually what they had been. Surface appearances were, indeed, the same, but they had "left their first love." The history of this Church may be reviewed. First, certain disciples of John the Baptist had taught a reformed Judaism. Then came the eloquent preaching of Apollos. Then the instructive work of Aquila and Priscilla, and then the three years' ministry of St. Paul. The Church was greatly attached to the apostle, but in the epistle to Timothy there have been found signs of what seems to be a

change of feeling toward him. And this may suggest one meaning of the expression, "thou hast left thy first love." There was much that deserved commendation in the Church at Ephesus. It must be borne in mind that it was a very difficult city to live a Christian life in. It was Eastern; Diana's great Temple was there; it was noted for its superstitions and magical arts. The Living Christ was able freely to praise their (1) works, (2) patience, (3) zeal, (4) good motive. But if the tone of Christ's praise is carefully estimated, it will be seen that He observed an *intensity* in these things, which itself indicated a sense of flagging soul life. Over-activity is a bad sign. Though surface things seemed right, there was weakness in the springs of life. There were signs of a serious change in them. Changed feeling towards St. Paul showed a changed state of soul; they were not keeping soul-steadfast. How did this changeableness, fickleness, come about? 1. Partly it was due to natural disposition. Fickle people need to watch themselves, and their varying moods, with unusual care. Impulsive people seldom have also staying power, and they soon flag. 2. Partly it resulted from the influence of circumstances. The strain of continuance is always trying, and the subtlety of false teachers undermines Christian vitality. 3. The neglect of private soul-culture leaves the inner life to flag. Such neglect often follows from undue absorption in worldly things. Application may be made to the sin and peril of the changeableness that is so sadly characteristic of Christian Churches nowadays. The signs of it are (1) craving for excitement; (2) wanting to be made to *feel*; (3) distaste of quiet spiritual influences. When a man has lost his soul's love and life, he tries to make up for the loss by ceremonies, or singing, or revivals. Men should ask themselves this question: How is it we *want* to be revived? Why are we not *keeping up* our high standard of Christian life?

III. **The Living Christ encourages wrestling with this weakness by promising permanency to them who overcome.**—"Eating the tree of life." See the tree in the Garden of Eden; and the tree figured later on, in this book of Revelation, which bore twelve manner of fruits, and these every month, so that it was permanently refreshing, sustaining a continuous high life and vigour. "Overcoming" includes (1) recognising the evil, as evil; (2) returning upon a better spirit—humility—new purposes—dependence; (3) watching against new failures. In all such recovery the Living Christ helps, fixing the new and better way into a permanency of goodness.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 1. *The Seven Stars and the Seven Candlesticks.*—This vision is the natural introduction to all that follows, and, indeed, defines the main purpose of the whole book, inasmuch as it shows us Christ, sustaining, directing, dwelling in, His Churches. The words of the text are meant to set forth the Churches and their servants, the Churches and their work, the Churches and their Lord.

I. **We have in the symbol important truths concerning the Churches and their servants.**—"The seven stars are the angels of the seven Churches." The word "angel" means messenger, and it is applied to priests, and, in one passage, to an officer of the synagogue. It does not mean here a supernatural being, but the minister, or spiritual pastor, of the Church. 1. The messengers are rulers. They are described in a double manner—by a name which expresses subordination, and by a figure which expresses authority. And this perfectly embodies the very essential characteristic of all office and power in Christ's Church. Dignity and authority mean liberty for more, and more self-forgetting, work. Power binds its possessor to toil. But to be servant of all does not mean to

do the bidding of all. The service which imitates Christ is helpfulness, not subjection. Neither the Church is to lord it over the messenger, nor the messenger over the Church. 2. The messengers and the Churches have at bottom the same work to do. Stars shine; so do lamps. Light comes from both—in different fashion, indeed, and of a different quality; but still, both are lights. These are in the Saviour's hands, those are by his side; but each is meant to stream out rays of brightness over a dark night. So, essentially, all Christian men have the same work to do. The ways of doing it differ, but the thing done is one. We have all one office and function, to be discharged by each in his own fashion—viz., to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. 3. The Churches and their messengers are alike in their religious condition and character. The messenger, or minister, represents the Churches completely. The religious condition of a Church, and that of its leaders, teachers, pastors, ever tend to be the same, as that of the level of water in two connected vessels. There is such a constant interaction and reciprocal influence, that uniformity results.

II. **The Churches and their work.**—1. The Church is to be *light*. Light is spontaneous, suggesting the involuntary influence of character. Light is silent and gentle, though so mighty. Light is self-invisible; revealing all things, it reveals not itself. The source you can see, but not the beams. So we are to shine—not showing ourselves, but our Master. 2. The Church's light is derived light. Two things are needed for the burning of a lamp: that it should be lit, and that it should be fed. In both respects, the light with which we shine is derived. Reflected, not self-originated, is all our radiance. A derived and transient light is all that any man can be. The condition of all our brightness is that Christ shall give us light. And the soul kindled by Christ must constantly be supplied with the grace and gift of His Divine spirit. 3. The Church's light is blended, or clustered, light. Each of these little communities is represented by one lamp. And that one light is composed of the united brightness of all the individuals who constitute the community. They are to have a character, an influence, a work, as a society, not merely as individuals. A Church is not to be merely a multitude of separate points of brilliancy, but the separate points are to coalesce into one great orbed brightness.

III. **The Churches and their Lord.**—His strengthening and watchful presence moves among the Churches, and is active on their behalf. That presence is a plain literal fact, however feebly we lay hold of it. He is with us, to hold up and to bless; to observe, to judge, and, if need be, to punish. And He is the same loving and forbearing Lord whom the apostle had learned to trust on earth, and found again revealed from heaven.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

Christ's Presence in His Church.—There is a subject of unusual interest suggested by the *attitude* in which the Living and Infinitely White Christ is represented as standing, and the *relations* which He is represented as actually bearing to the "stars" and the "candlesticks," which are the symbols of the Church, and its ministry. "The seven stars are the angels of the seven Churches; and the seven candlesticks are seven Churches." That subject is, the actual presence, and practical working, of Christ, in His Church of every age, and in His Church of to-day. To put it in another form: Does the Living Christ still reserve to Himself, even into this nineteenth century, His executive and administrative, as well as His legislative, rights? Those rights He certainly did exercise in the first Churches of the redeemed, for the Church at Ephesus is called to recognise Him in this way—"These things saith He that *holdeth* the seven stars in His right hand, He that *walketh* in

the midst of the seven golden candlesticks."

I. **The actual presence of the Living Christ with His Church is the Church's most precious truth.**—It always, and everywhere, has been recognised as such. So far as theory is concerned, the living headship of Christ has always been the Church's theory. What we have to complain of is, not that the truth has ever been really lost, but that it has so often been buried, and therefore practically lost. The constant work of the Christian ages has been recovering lost truths, and getting neglected truths estimated at their right value. If the truth of the actual presence of Christ in His Church to-day were a *new* truth, it could not be true. It is only a half-buried old truth; one that has been covered over with the dust of men's formulæ; one that claimed the first place, but was soon pushed back into a second, when ecclesiastics grasped the duties and rights of Him who is "above for evermore"; and then into a third, when men made so much more of *getting into* the kingdom than of the *conduct* becoming to those *in* the kingdom. I want to show you that Christ's permanent abiding in His Church was the true Messianic expectation; it was our Lord's own anticipation, and it was the realisation, and the teaching, of His apostles. We may possibly come to see that the indwelling and presiding "Holy Ghost" of the Church of the redeemed is simply the form under which this presence, and consequent presidency, of the Living Christ is now to be recognised by us. Christ, spiritually present, and spiritually working, is the Holy Ghost. There are three possible thoughts that we may cherish concerning the continuance of Christ's life beyond His human death on the cross. We may think of Him as simply alive again, as men, we assume, will be alive again after the great resurrection-morn. Or we may think of Him as altogether removed from earthly scenes, dwelling away in the heavenlies, and there wholly engaged in what may be found necessary for the completion of His redemptive work. Probably most Christian people cherish *this* thought of the Risen Christ, to the exclusion of all others. To them He is the great High Priest; the Advocate with the Father; the Angel of the Covenant. He is *there*, and only there, in the "Temple not made with hands." But there is another thought of Him, which it would be a new inspiration to us to cherish. He is back again amid mortal scenes. He is as really, nay, more really, here with us now, than when He seemed to live in our homes, eat our food, and speak our words. He went away in order that He might come and abide. He went away from our senses that He might come to our souls. The Church is His Temple; in it He dwells and rules. All is spiritual, the Church, the Temple, the rule; but then, the spiritual is the real, the material is only the picture and the seeming. It is this truth concerning Christ that heroic souls have kept alive through the long Christian ages of struggle and of error. It is this truth which is now every day getting into clearer light. It is this truth which is destined to revolutionise Christianity—not the Christianity of Christ, that only needs restoration, but the Christianity that men have made for themselves out of the revelation that has been given to them. The key-note of the Christianity of the future will be, Christ come; Christ here; Christ spiritually present; Christ saving now; Christ sanctifying now; Christ ruling now. Really, to-day "holding the stars, and walking among the candlesticks." 1. It is the truth foreshadowed in Messianic picture-teachings. Men would make less of particular Messianic psalms, and Messianic prophecies, if they more clearly saw that the Mosaic dispensation was, in its *very essence*, Messianic. It is but the expression, fitted for the times, of the primary idea of the "theocracy"; and the "theocracy" was but the preparatory picture-teach-

ing of Christ's spiritual rule over His Church and in His Church. By the term "theocracy" is meant, God's immediate and direct rule. Without delegation, or mediation, or intervention, He, actually present with them, controlled, instructed, guided, rewarded, punished, the Jewish nation. That material rule fitted to the times, but it prepared the way for a *spiritual* realisation of the *spiritual* truth that it embodied. Christ is God, spiritually present in His spiritual Church, spiritually ruling, and ordering, and sanctifying. 2. And this is the relation He would sustain which was anticipated by Christ. We cannot be surprised to find it held in reserve by our Lord during the earlier part of His ministry. It would have been of no use whatever to speak of a *spiritual* presence to His disciples while they were so full of *worldly* ideas and expectations. He had to wait until some beginnings of spiritual apprehension were made by at least some of them. And yet there are many indications that it was always in His thoughts, and hints of it were given when plain words could not be spoken. When He referred to His coming rejection and death, He usually closed His remarks with an allusion to His resurrection, as if He would set the disciples thinking what He *would be* to them in that risen life. When He came to them in the grey and misty morning, walking upon the sea, He evidently intended to help them towards realising His presence with them in other than sense conditions. That was a stage in His education of them to the apprehension of the unseen. When He had only the chosen band around Him in the upper room, He could speak more freely than He had ever been able to speak before. *He* felt the closing of the earthly, sensuous relations. He knew what a strain it would be to those *disciples*. And therefore He bent all His effort to the work of cheering them by the repeated assurance that it would be no real loss to them; it would, indeed, be the most real gain. They might at first think that it was *another* one who would come to be in them, and to abide with them for ever; but presently it would seem clear to them that Him they called the "Holy Spirit" was, in deepest reality, Jesus Himself with them in a spiritual way, fulfilling His own gracious word, "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you; the world seeth Me no more, but ye see Me." And then that strange coming into vision, and passing out of vision, of the Resurrection days, was His most gracious way of loosening their hold on His *bodily* presence, and clearing their apprehension of His *spiritual* presence. And when they saw Him go up from earth, and the cloud hid Him from their sense-view for ever, His last words were in their souls, and they were left to think out, and feel out, their wondrous meanings: "Lo, *I am with you* all the days." 3. And this truth of Christ's present spiritual abiding in His Church was distinctly the realisation, and the teaching, of His apostles. St. Peter stood by the bedside of sick Æneas, and spoke as if Jesus was actually there; *he* could see Him, and Æneas might if he would look aright. "Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." It is firmly asserted that, on certain occasions, "the power of the Lord was present to heal." In the great crises of St. Paul's life, Christ's presence with him and ruling of his course, was revealed to him in personal visions. In such a chapter as the third in the epistle to the Colossians, every act and effort of the Christian life is directly referred to Christ's present inspection: everything is to be done "as unto the Lord." And the one purpose of the book of Revelation is to associate the Living, Spiritual Christ, in a very direct way, with all the growth, the sins, the frailties, the conflicts, the sorrows, the varied experiences, of His Church. The key-note of the book is struck in the first chapter. The Christ presented in such suggestive symbols is not the Christ of the *heavenly places*—

how the book is misconceived when that idea is unduly pressed!—it is the Christ of the *Churches*—the presiding Spirit of the Churches; it is the infinitely White One with the sword, who "holds the stars in His right hand, and walks among the candlesticks"; who presided over every movement of the Churches of that day, Ephesus, and Smyrna, and the rest; who presides over every movement of His universal Church in all the ages.

II. **The Living Christ, spiritually present, stands in a twofold relation to His Church.**—The one relation is universally admitted; the other is generally obscured, misrepresented, neglected, and imperilled: and to some is entrusted the work of recovering, and setting forth afresh in view of men, the imperilled relations. Every human government has two functions, legislative and administrative. It makes laws, and it provides the machinery for carrying out its laws, actually presiding over their administration. A curious relic of the idea that the Sovereign actually executes her own laws is found in the ceremony of opening the Assizes in our county towns. The judges are met, on entering the town, with a state ceremony, as if they were actually the Queen. The Assize is opened on the assumption that it is the Queen herself who is going to try, and condemn or acquit, the prisoners. The fiction of her presence is constantly maintained, and her executive, as well as her legislative, rights are preserved. The right of the Lord Jesus to make laws for His Church is never disputed. The Pope of Rome is but the Vicar of Christ, and he is as zealous as we can be of the legislative claims of his supreme and sovereign Lord. But the assumption is that He only makes the laws, and makes them away up in heaven, and commits the carrying out of His laws to some delegates here on earth. It is supposed that He committed the carrying out of His laws first to St. Peter, through him to the Pope, through the Pope to the bishops, and through the bishops to the priests. And so we have on earth now, not Christ, but a *Church*, which is supposed to represent Him, and carry His authority. Or we may say that, while the legislative rights of Jesus are duly honoured, He is thought of as having surrendered His executive and administrative rights. He keeps Himself now altogether in the heavenly spheres—He is not here; and His Church, or rather a certain order of priests in His Church, consider they have the right to take His place and do His work. Now you can clearly see the principle for which contest has been variously made through all the Christian ages—the principle for which again, in our day, a holy fight must be waged. As to particular methods of organising Churches, special arrangements of ministry, or systems of government, we have nothing whatever to say. Let every man find out what is best for him, and let every man give me full liberty to find out what is best for me. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." Only we take our stand here; we draw the line here. No plan, no system, must touch the real, present, practical administrative rights of the Lord Jesus. No scheme must even *seem* to shut Christ up in heaven, and keep Him seated on His throne. No effort must be made to teach that Christ has put his royal rights into commission, so that we can now have no direct dealings with Him, but must deal with priest, or bishop, or earthly sovereign, or Roman Pope, who claim to speak in His name. It is not some fact of a bygone age that He once held the stars in His right hand, and once walked among the candlesticks. It is the fact of the hour; it is the truth of to-day. He is the executor of His own laws. He does now actually Himself hold the stars in His right hand, and walk among the candlesticks. The history of Christianity is really the story of man's varied efforts to establish a mediatorship between *Christ and men*. There must be none. There can be none. Christ is mediator between

man and God. But Christ's relation to man is direct. There must be no attempt to push in any mediation between Christ and the soul. The history of Christianity is the heroic story of the struggles of men who fought for, and died for, the administrative rights of Christ. Their conflict took a variety of forms, but the essence of it always was the resistance of all human mediatorship between Christ and His Church.

Ver. 4. *Losing First Love.*—The first love had gone out of their religion; there was a tendency to fall into a mechanical faith, strong against heresy, but tolerant of conventionalism. Their temptations did not arise from the prevalence of error, or the bitterness of persecution, but from a disposition to fall backward, and again do the dead works of the past. There was not so much need to take heed unto their doctrine, but there was great need that they should take heed unto themselves (1 Tim. iv. 16; compare Acts xx. 28). When there is danger because earnestness in the holy cause is dying out, and the very decorum of religion has become a snare, what more fitting than to be reminded of Him whose hand can strengthen and uphold them, and who walks among the candlesticks to supply them with the oil of fresh love (ver. 1)? The decay of love is the decay of that without which all other graces are as nothing (1 Cor. xiii. 1-3), since "all religion is summed up in one word, Love. God asks this; we cannot give more, He cannot take less." Great as the fault is, it is the fault which Love alone could have detected. Can any one more touchingly rebuke than by commencing, "Thou no longer lovest me enough"? There is at present, in the Ephesian Church, little outward sign of decay; they have resisted evil and false teachers; they have shown toil and endurance; but the great Searcher of hearts detects the almost imperceptible signs of an incipient decay. He alone can tell the moment when love of truth is passing into a noisy, Pharisaic zealotism; when men are "settling down into a lower state of spiritual life than that which they once aimed at and once knew."—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

The True Problem of Christian Experience.—There are many disciples of our time, who, like the Ephesian disciples, are to be warmly commended for their intended fidelity, and are yet greatly troubled and depressed by what appears to be a real loss of ground in their piety. They are compelled to sigh over a certain subsidence of that pure sensibility, and that high inspiration, in which their discipleship began. The clearness of that hour is blurred, the fresh joy interspaced with dryness.

I. **The relation of the first love, or the beginning of the Christian discipleship, to the subsequent life.**—What we call conversion is not a change distinctly traceable in the experience of all disciples, though it is, and must be, a realised fact in all. There are many that grew up out of their infancy, or childhood, in the grace of Christ, and remember no time when they began to love Him. Even such, however, will commonly remember a time when their love to God and Divine things became a fact so fresh, so newly conscious, as to raise a doubt whether it was not then for the first time kindled. In other cases there is no doubt of a beginning, a real, conscious, definitely remembered beginning, a new turning to God, a fresh-born Christian love. What is the import of such a state? what its relation to the subsequent life and character? It is a character begun, a Divine fact accomplished, in which the subject is started on a new career of regenerated liberty in good. But it is not a completed gift, which only needs to be held fast. It is one of God's beginnings, which He will carry on to perfection. In one view, indeed, it is a kind of perfect state—a state resembling innocence. It is free, it is full of God, it is, for the time, without care. In this flowering state of beauty the soul discovers, and even has in its feeling, the sense of

perfection, and is thus awakened from within to the great ideal, in which its bliss is to be consummated. The perfection conceived, too, and set up as a mark of attainment, is something more than a form of grace to be hereafter realised. It is now realised, as far as it can be. There is a certain analogy between this state, paradisaically beautiful, pure, and clean, and that external paradise in which our human history began. Still, the probability that any one will continue in the clearness and freshness of his first love to God, suffering no apparent loss, falling into no disturbance or state of self-accusing doubt, is not great. Where the love is really not lost, it will commonly need to be conquered again, over and over, and wrought into the soul by a protracted and resolute warfare. A mere glance at the newborn state of love discovers how incomplete and unreliable it is. An angel, as it were, in feeling, it is yet a child in self-understanding. The significance of the first love, as related to subsequent life, is twofold. In the first place, it is the birth of a new, supernatural, and Divine consciousness in the soul, in which it is raised to another plane, and begins to live as from a new point. And, secondly, it is so much of a reality, or fact realised, that it initiates, in the subject, experimentally, a conception of that rest, that fulness, and peace, and joyous purity, in which it will be the bliss and greatness of his eternity to be established. In both respects it is the beginning of the end; and yet, to carry the beginning over to the end, and give it there its due fulfilment, requires a large and varied trial of experience.

II. **The relation of the subsequent life, including its apparent losses, to its beginning.**—The real object of the subsequent life, as a struggle of experience, is to produce in wisdom what is there begotten as a feeling or a new love, and thus to make a fixed state of that which was initiated only as a love. It is to convert a heavenly impulse into a heavenly habit, to raise the Christian childhood into a Christian manhood. The paradise of first love is a germ, we may conceive, in the soul's feeling, of the paradise to be fulfilled in its wisdom. At first the disciple knows very little of himself. At first nothing co-operates in settled harmony with his new life; but if he is faithful, he will learn how to make everything in him work with it, and assist the edifying of his soul in love. A great point is the learning how to maintain his new supernatural relation of sonship and vital access to God. And through the same course of experience, he conceives more and more perfectly what is the true idea of character. At first, character is to him a mere feeling or impulse—a frame. Next it becomes a life of work and self-denial. Next, a principle—nothing but a matter of principle. Next he conceives that it is something outwardly beautiful—a beautiful life. Character is at last conceived as a life whose action, choice, thought, and expression, are all animated and shaped by the spirit of holiness and Divine beauty which was first breathed into his feeling. A great point to be gained in the struggle of experience is to learn when one has a right to the state of confidence and rest. By a similar process he learns how to modulate and direct his will. His thinking power undergoes a similar discipline. At first he had a very perplexing war with his motives. The new love kindled by the Spirit has to maintain itself in company with great personal defects in the subject. And his temporary failures may occasion great distress. Still, the process of God is contrived to bring us round, at last, to the simple state which we embraced, in feeling, and help us to embrace it in wisdom. The beginning is the beginning of the end—the end, the child and fruit of the beginning. The fact, then, of a truly first love, the grand Christian fact of a spiritual conversion or regeneration, is no way obscured by the losing experiences that so often follow. On the contrary, its evidence is rather augmented by these

irregularities and seeming defections. And, if it be more than nothing, then it is, of all mortal experiences, the chief; a change mysterious, tremendous, luminous, joyful, fearful—everything which a first contact of acquaintance with God can make it.—*H. Bushnell, D.D.*

Ver. 7. *Overcoming.*—Life on the earth for moral beings is not what *we* would have made it, if we had been entrusted with the making. Why should it cost such conflict for moral beings to win, and keep, goodness? For it does.

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the place where sorrow is unknown."

That is a truth concerning our life on the earth which there is no gainsaying. Nothing, indeed, that is really worth having is easy to gain. That which costs nothing always proves to be nothing worth. St. Paul speaks of the battle of life, and shows us how to win it. St. John speaks of our "overcoming." The fight is a continuous and prolonged one. We never end it, save with the ending of our earthly life. This fact, this truth, is freshly and vigorously impressed by the message of the Living Christ sent to the Churches of Asia. These seven messages tell what the Living Christ watches—*us* in the fight; us *fighting*. These seven messages tell what the Living Christ will do. Reward those who overcome.

I. **All of us have something to wrestle with and overcome.**—1. Something preventing our success in life. Often we say that circumstances hinder us. Nay, the truth is this: we will not fight. 2. Something preventing our surrender to Christ. Something we persist in clinging to, something we will not wrestle with and master. 3. Something preventing our union with His Church. 4. Something preventing growth of character. It often is something in the *self*, in the natural or educated disposition, that makes our great fight; some weakness of character, some besetting sin, some unworthy habit. Or it may be something in our surroundings, our place of business, our companionships, our pleasures. It may be something of sin or temptation, as it meets us out in life. Whatever it may be, we are not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good.

II. **There is only one way in which we may hope to overcome.**—There are self-reliant ways that men try. They trust in vows, resolves, character, efforts. But life sternly deals with all merely self-efforts, and refuses to let man reap a moral victory in his own strength. There is really only one way. The fight must be waged under the leading of the great Captain of Salvation. By the sign of the cross we conquer, or, to use a Scripture figure, we "overcome by the blood of the Lamb." David conquered Goliath because the wisdom and strength of God were upon his wisdom and strength. St. Paul could do all things "through Him who strengthened him." We may be "more than conquerors through Him that loved us." It is a *spiritual* fight, and for it we can have our Lord's *spiritual* presence—and this presence as help for the small things of life.

III. **Gracious rewards await those who overcome.**—There is nothing for those who never knew what it was to fight. But the rewards of victors in the moral conflict can only be presented to us in figures. The messages to the Seven Churches indicate that the reward will be precisely adapted to each precise fight, and each precise victor. But, whatever else may be said, the smile and acceptance of Jesus is the one all-satisfying reward. 1. Ephesus—fading, or lost, *life* of love. Reward: the quickening and sustaining tree of life. 2. Smyrna—test of martyrdom (Polycarp). Reward: "Not hurt of *second* death." 3. Pergamos—failing purity. Reward: gift of the White Stone. 4. Thyatira—outward heathen temptations. Reward: mastery over

influence of evil. 5. Philadelphia—the steadfast. Reward: made a pillar, with Christ's great Name inscribed upon it. 6. Laodicea—the self-satisfied. Reward: sit beside Christ, the King of the lowly. It should be our joy that we are in the Lord's war, and under the Lord's eye, and assured of the Lord's acceptance. Then, every day, and everywhere, let us be fully determined that we will "overcome."

The Symbol of Eating of the Tree of Life.—Prominent as this symbol had been in the primeval history, it had remained unnoticed in the teaching where we should most have looked for its presence—in that of the Psalmists and the Prophets of the Old Testament. Only in the Proverbs of Solomon had it been used, in a sense half allegorical and half mystical. (See Prov. iii. 18, xi. 30, xiii. 12, xv. 4.) In connection with the revival of the symbol in the Apocalypse, it may be noted—1. That it was the natural sequel of the fresh prominence that had recently been given to the thought of Paradise. 2. That the writings of Philo had specifically called attention to the tree of life as being the mystical type of the highest form of wisdom and holiness—the fear of God (*θεοσεβεία*) by which the soul attains to immortality. We trace, in other things at least, the indirect influence of Philo's teaching on the thoughts and language of St. John, and as we must assume that all imagery is adapted, even in the words of the Divine Speaker, to the minds of those who hear, there seems no reason why we should not admit the working of that influence here. It may be asked, however, What is the meaning of the symbol, as thus used? How are we to translate it into the language of more abstract truth? And here, if I mistake not, the more developed form of the symbol, at the close of the Apocalypse, gives us the true answer: "The tree of life bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Rev. xxii. 2). The leaves and the fruit obviously represent, the one the full and direct, the other the partial and indirect, workings of that eternal life which St. John thought of as manifested in the Incarnate Word. The "healing of the nations," the elevation of their standard of purity and holiness, of duty and of love—this has been the work of that partial knowledge which the Church of Christ has been instrumental in diffusing. Its influence has counteracted the deadly working of the fruit of the other tree of "the knowledge of good and evil," which we trace as due to a wisdom that is earthly, sensual, devilish. But to "eat of the tree of life" implies a more complete fruition, a higher communion and fellowship with the source of life. And here, therefore, I cannot but think that the promise of the Judge points to the truth that He is Himself, now, as ever, the "exceeding great reward" (Gen. xv. 1) of those that serve Him faithfully; that the symbol veils the truth; that "this is life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent" (John xvii. 3).—*Dean Plumptre.*

Legends Concerning the Tree of Life.—In an old, rare book, called "Adam's Repentance," it is said that Seth, the third son of Adam, went to the gate of Paradise at the request of his dying father, and there received from the angel in charge three seeds of the tree of life, which he put in the mouth of Adam when he buried him. From these grew three saplings, from which were taken the wood for Moses' rod, and that by which the waters of Marah, in the desert, were sweetened. The temple of David was also built of the wood of these trees, and the bench on which the heathen Sibyls sat when they prophesied the coming of Christ. Moses' rod was planted in Canaan, and also became a tree, from which the cross of Christ, the new tree of life, was made, and the eternal life, lost in Adam, regained. This legend is fully

portrayed in a picture on the altar of a Church in Leyden. It is, perhaps, founded on a simpler story told by Sozomen, the ecclesiastical historian, that at Hermopolis, in Egypt, stood the tree Persis, the fruit, leaves, and bark whereof possessed wonderful healing qualities. When the Virgin Mary, on her flight to Egypt with the infant Jesus, rested under this tree, it bowed its whole length in humble reverence to Jesus as the true Lord of life and health. The *arbor vitæ*, familiar to us, is sculptured on Egyptian tombs, as a symbol of belief in another existence beyond the grave. In the Middle Ages it was said that whosoever would eat of the wood of this tree of life would be preserved from weakness and decrepitude, and would be rendered invincible as Achilles. It was also said that to eat of its foliage would cause one to forget all hunger and care.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8—11.

Cheer for the Faithful.—He who spake in parables, as the human Christ, speaks in figures and symbols as the Living Christ. Smyrna, now "Ismir" is still an important commercial city of Ionia, with a population of some hundred and twenty thousand. It claims to be the birthplace of Homer. The vine was much cultivated; Dionysos, the God of wine, was worshipped, and intemperance was the characteristic sin of the inhabitants. Dionysos represents the productive, overflowing, intoxicating power of nature, and of this, wine is the natural and appropriate symbol. The association of Polycarp with this epistle is very uncertain, but his martyrdom may be used as illustration. Perhaps he was ordained by St. John; he succeeded Bucolus as bishop of Smyrna, and was martyred A.D. 156, or 157, in the reign of Marcus Antoninus. Evidently the one thing specially noticed by the Living Christ, when inspecting this Church, is its heroic endurance of outward persecution. It was severely subject to the strain of circumstances, and bore it nobly and well. Smyrna suffers for the sake of its culture (as Job did); other Churches suffer as discipline for correction. It is important to face the fact, that a godly *individual* may be called to suffer simply as an agency to secure his higher culture; and it is equally true that a Christian Church may be put into circumstances of grave anxiety and distress, with a view to securing its spiritual culture.

I. **The figure in which the Living Christ appears to this Church.**—"The first and the last, which was dead and lived again." The key-note of the epistle is this: Christ died to live again—to live *truly*. You die, and you too shall live again—shall live indeed. (Some think the figure may be suggested by the legend of the violent death, and the resurrection, of Dionysos; but see chap. i. 17, 18.)

II. **The things noticed in this Church by the Living Christ.**—The word "works" is best understood, not as active, energetic, enterprising works, but as suggested by the two following and explanatory terms, "labour," or strain, bearing, and "patience," the virtue of the sufferer. The "works" of Smyrna were passive-bearing rather than active-doing. The Living Christ finds no ground of open complaint; and yet, the very fact that there was need for disciplinary and culturing trouble to do a gracious work in the Church, implies some imperfection. The Living Christ saw three things. 1. The tribulation the Church had to endure. 2. The poverty of circumstances which the tribulation involved; and 3. The insults offered by the bigoted Jewish party. Each of these troubles would be hard to bear; the three together made a hard lot indeed. The question of supreme interest to Him who inspected the Church was this: "Would they live—as they might live—by getting from under the pressure of these evils? Or were they willing to die—die to self, as they might die—by nobly yielding to bear them? If they would live by denying Christ, then they would

die to the eternal life. If they would die, by suffering for Christ, then they should live to the eternal life. Illustrate by the familiar picture, "Diana or Christ?" Matamoros, the Spanish martyr, is reported to have said, "I purpose to be steadfast to the end, be that what it may."

III. **The message sent to the Church by the Living Christ.**—It was the anticipation of further strain, to which the Church would be subject, and a gracious warning in relation to it. "Prison and death;" not relief, but more trial. "Ten days;" the figure of completeness as a test, but implying a limited time. But the warning blends with encouragement and assurance. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." It seems that the priests of Dionysos were presented with a crown; but the crown that Jesus gives is a crown *of life*. The story of the martyrdom of Bishop Polycarp closes with the words, "By his patience he overcame the unrighteous ruler, and received the crown of immortality."

IV. **The provision which the Living Christ makes for those who overcome.**—"Not be hurt of the second death." That expression, "second death," is not to be found in either the gospels or the epistles. Here is a strange thing: they were to conquer by yielding, to overcome by dying. "Death"—the consummation of persecution and suffering, is the prominent figure of this message. Christ suffered unto death, and gained His victory through death. They were to be "faithful unto death," and so they were to be secured from the "second death." The first death is death unto self. The second death is death unto God. Suffer the first, and you are saved from the second. In this we find but a repetition of our Lord's earthly teachings, for He said, "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." See the principle illustrated in the Church at Smyrna, regarding Bishop Polycarp as its type. He was aged when arrested. He was offered his life if he would sacrifice to the Emperor. And though he was aged, life was precious. He died unto self, and lives unto God. See the principle illustrated in a Church of to-day. A Church may have to pass through times of outward trouble as *correction*, but it is also true that the purpose of the trouble may only be *culture*. Can it bear? Can it suffer? Can it even be crushed, and, as it were, die? If it can, what shall it win? Show what features of the higher Church-life can be won only through the experience of well-borne suffering. There are martyrs who do not die—who are just heroic endurers. And, both as individuals and as Churches, we need to think of ourselves as those who serve Him who died to self, and lived, and lives, to God.

Note on Dionysos.—The tutelary deity of Smyrna was the god of wine, who represented the productive, overflowing, and intoxicating power of nature. The story of the violent death and subsequent resurrection of this god was particularly celebrated by the people of Smyrna, and there may be a reference to this in the figure chosen to represent Christ. "Was dead, and is alive again." The priests who annually presided at the celebration of the resurrection of Dionysos were persons of distinction, and at the end of their year of office they were presented with a crown.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 9. *Poverty in the Early Churches.*—Persecution has its heroic side, and under its stimulus men may do and dare much; but when, in addition to this, there is the daily pressure of ignoble cares, the living as from hand to mouth, the insufficient food and the scanty, squalid clothing of the beggar, the trial becomes more wearying, and calls for greater fortitude and faith.

We do not sufficiently estimate, I believe, this element in the sufferings of the first believers. Taken for the most part from the humbler class of artizans; often thrown out of employment by the very fact of their conversion, with new claims upon them from the afflicted members of the great family of Christ close at hand or afar off, and a new energy of sacrifice prompting them to admit those claims; subjected, not unfrequently, to the "spoiling of their goods" (Heb. x. 34);—we cannot wonder that they should have had little earthly store, and that their reserve of capital should have been rapidly exhausted. Poverty brought with it some trials to which those who had been devout Jews (Israelites) before their conversion, and who had not ceased to claim their position as such, would be peculiarly sensitive. In the synagogue which they had been in the habit of attending, and which there was no reason for their at once forsaking—perhaps even in the assemblies of Jewish disciples, which still retained the old name and many of the old usages—they would find themselves scorned and scoffed at, thrust into the background, below the footstool of the opulent traders in whom a city like Smyrna was sure to abound (James ii. 2, 3). The hatred which the unbelieving Jews felt for the name of Christ would connect itself with their purse-proud scorn of the poor and needy, and "those beggars of Christians" would become a byword of reproach.—*Dean Plumptre.*

Ver. 10. *Faithful. Christian Faithfulness.*—Bishop Polycarp was martyred A.D. 168, long years after the book of Revelation was written, but his story glorifies the place (see "Illustrations"). In most of the other messages, complaint and commendation are blended. In this to Smyrna there is no complaint. The point of the message is, that this Church must expect unusual trouble. And that is God's frequently allotted experience for the unusually devout: the better souls are the very ones that respond best to the holy, refining fires; fine gold is most worth refining. Their trouble was to take three forms: the despoiling of their goods, peril of life, and calumny, or slander. Some would be cast into prison. The great "*tribulum*," the mighty threshing roller of persecution, would go over their heap of wheat, to and fro, back and again, through the ten long years of Marcus Antoninus' reign. Man would say, It is overwhelming, crushing. Christ says, the *tribulum* of God never crushes; it only, with strong hand, separates the chaff from the wheat, that the wheat may be gathered into the garner.

I. **Our Lord's call to an afflicted Church.**—"Be faithful," even to death-limits. In all His dealings with His people, our Lord is ever more anxious about them than about their circumstances. We are worried and anxious about our circumstances, but Christ is not. His anxiety concerns our moral and spiritual state. Nothing relieves us, in times of distress and pain, like this thought: my Lord wants *me to be right*; and that explains why persecution abides, why misunderstandings will not get corrected, why pain cannot be taken away, why the "thorn" stays, and we are thrown wholly on the "strengthening grace." The Living Christ does not send to Smyrna saying, "I foresaw persecution and slander threatening you, and I warded it off." He does not even, when it comes upon them, put forth miraculous power for its removal. He leaves the great providential workings alone, but calls upon His people to be noble in the very midst of suffering. "Be thou faithful." "Faithful" is a familiar Scripture term used concerning men, and even used of God. Abraham was faithful. Moses is "faithful in Mine house." Samuel was faithful to be a prophet of the Lord. "Who is so faithful as Daniel?" "Hananiah was a faithful man." "Judah is faithful with the saints." "Timothy is faithful in the Lord." "Tychicus is a beloved brother and faithful minister." "Antipas was My faithful martyr." God is spoken

of as "the faithful God who keepeth covenant"; and "we are to commit our souls to Him as unto a faithful Creator." Christ is "the Faithful Witness," and His people are "saints and faithful brethren in Christ Jesus." The figure in the word is that of "keeping covenant." Those who are in covenant take mutual pledges and come under mutual responsibilities. To meet those responsibilities and fulfil those pledges is to be faithful, and so the word applies to all positions of service or ministry, since all such are really covenant-positions. And we have entered into solemn and everlasting covenant with Christ. He has entrusted to us His truth, His rights, His work in the world. Every one of us lies under this holy burden, unless we be reprobates. Then, being faithful means: 1. *Faithful in keeping the truth entrusted to us.* It does not matter how few or how simple you make the great primary truths and principles of Christianity to be, there certainly are some truths which are characteristically Christian—that is, which have been brought to light and set forth in the world of human thought by Jesus Christ as the essential first principles of what is called the Christian system. If men do not accept these, they may call themselves by what name they please, they are not Christians. The fundamental revelation of Christ is the Fatherhood of God. This discovers the helpless, prodigal condition of man. And it prepares the way for a redemption of love, wrought by God Himself, operating, in the sphere of the senses, by the manifestation of the Son in our world, and, in the spheres of mind and soul, by the grace and power of the Holy Ghost. And the test of the acceptance of this revelation, this whole circle of truth, is the view that is taken of the *person* of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Early Ages, again in the Middle Ages, and yet again now in our day, our faithfulness to the Christian truth is tested by our answer to this question concerning Christ, "Whose Son is He?" And the answer must ring out clear as the midnight hour from cathedral chimes: He is "God manifest in the flesh." "The Word was God." "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." We may yield a large and generous liberty to men in relation to the forms and terms in which they set the truth in Christ. But we have a trust: in regard to it we must be found faithful. We would "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints," the faith of Christ, who is God; of Christ, who is Man; of Christ, who has atoned; of Christ, who does redeem; of Christ, who ever lives; of Christ, who is "Head over all things to His Church"; of Christ, who will one day "judge the world in righteousness." 2. *Faithful in manifesting the spirit that is becoming to Christ's servants.* For there is a spirit, a tone, an atmosphere of mind and feeling, which is peculiarly becoming to Christianity; a spirit which times of trouble, and especially times of calumny, misunderstanding, and slander, such as Smyrna passed through, seriously affect. In this, too, the Living Christ bids us "Be faithful." The spirit becoming to us is comprehensively called *love.* Jesus bade His disciples "Love one another." And St. Paul elaborates the great Christian grace in writing to the Corinthians (chap. xiii.). How readily those Christians at Smyrna might lose love and brotherhood when conflict of opinion and persecution arose and "a man's foes were they of his own household"! How difficult to keep calm, gentle, loving, when their very good was evil spoken of, and malignant Judaisers blasphemed them for their liberty in Christ! They might hold fast by the Christian truth and yet lose the Christian spirit, and so prove themselves unworthy followers of Him who, "though He was reviled, reviled not again, though He suffered, threatened not"; of Him who, dying on a cruel cross, prayed for His murderers, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," passing out of life full of heavenly, Divine charity. Perhaps it is the very hardest thing

we have to do in life, to be firm to the truth, manly in stating settled convictions, brave to point out public wrongs, and yet not lose love, or fail from the Christian spirit when our work is misunderstood, our purpose maligned, and slanders abound which must not be followed and fought through. Happy indeed is he who at such times may "in patience possess his soul;" unto whom God gives the grace of patience and gentleness, that he may be found faithful, "hoping all things, enduring all things." 3. *Faithful in doing that work of grace in the world which Christ wants carried through.* For a Church has no right to exist, save as it is an active, working Church. A Christian man has no right to his Christian comfortings and hopes, save as he is an active, working Christian. There are spheres for every one of us. We must find for ourselves what ours is. Nobody can tell us. Having found our sphere, the text has its message for us: "Be thou faithful." Our work may be witness, prayer, influence, giving, teaching, writing, ministry, or other form of service. But *faithful* is by no means to be confused with *successful*; and yet, so full of business ideas, that is very much how we read His meaning. It is not the grandest thing in life to be successful. Success is the false idol-god of this age, and strives hard to take the place of the Lord Jesus. No man ever sees the nobility of human life until he learns to put success second, and faithfulness first. Very often that very thing on which men have pityingly gazed, and called it a failure, God has regarded as among the noblest achievements of the sons of men.

II. **For the faithful ones Christ keeps the holy reward, the crown of life.**—Bound four together at the stake, the nobles of Madagascar glorified God in the fires, "faithful unto death"; and as they died a lovely rainbow spanned the scene, and crowned those heroic souls. Forth from the conflict in Olympic and Isthmian games conquerors went, with circlets of ivy, or of parsley, twined about their brows; crowned, men called it, and they meant, sealed as conquerors, recognised as conquerors, stamped as kingly among their fellows, attested as heroes. Worthless enough in itself, the parsley wreath expressed so much; and the city of him who wore it woke to feel its exceeding honour, and when he returned from the games, flung wide open its gates, nay, even sometimes made a new way through its walls, for him who seemed to them too noble to enter as might commoner men. And Christ gives no crown that may arrest attention for its own value. He gives one which shall be for earth and heaven, the sign of conflict maintained and victory won. The life of faithfulness shall be crowned with acceptance and permanency. The struggle for righteousness shall be crowned with the eternal seal of righteousness. The work for the glory of a completed obedience shall be sealed with the seal of sonship, and the welcome for the "blessed of the Father." This is Christian life in its progress: being faithful. This is Christian life in its ending: being faithful unto death. And this is Christian life passed through into the unknown: crowned with the crown of life.

The Reward of Faithfulness.—Learn that the religion of Christ—

I. **Requires faithfulness.**—To be faithful in religion means that the believer should make use of all his powers on behalf of—1. Religion. 2. Religion in the circle in which God has placed him. 3. Religion according to God's will.

II. **Requires personal faithfulness.**—Because every Christian—1. Has a personal work to accomplish. 2. Is endowed with power to accomplish his own work. 3. Is under a personal obligation to be faithful.

III. **Requires continual faithfulness.**—Because—1. The work is great. 2. The time is short.

IV. **The religion of Christ rewards this personal and continual faithful-**

ness.—The reward is — 1. Precious—"a crown." 2. Glorious—"a crown of life. 3. Durable—"life." 4. Personal —"I will give *thee.*"—*J. O. Griffiths.*

Ver. 11. *Second Death.*—(See chap. xx. 14, 15).—The imagery of the fiery lake, like that of the worm and the flame of the Valley of Hinnom, may be but imagery, but it points, at least, to some dread reality which is veiled beneath those awful symbols. What that reality is we may infer from St. John's conceptions of the higher life. If the first death is the loss of the first or earthly life, then the second death must be the loss of that knowledge of God which makes the blessedness of eternal life—and that loss is, at least, compatible with the thought of continuous existence. What possibilities in the far-off future were shadowed forth by the mysterious words that "Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire"! As though they were to be robbed of their power to destroy, and were punished as the great enemies of God and man. How far those who were cast in with them might even there be not shut out from hope, it was not given to the seer of the Apocalypse to know, nor did he care to ask. It was enough for the faithful sufferers under persecution, who overcame in that conflict with the *plurima mortis imago*, to which they were exposed, to know that this was all that their enemies could inflict on them, and that the "second death" should have no power over them.—*Dean Plumptre.*

Ver. 11. *The Three Deaths of Scripture.*—In the New Testament, death is spoken of in three different senses. For it is regarded as simply a separation from some form of life; which modern science acknowledges to be a strictly accurate view to take of death. In scientific language, it is the cessation of a correspondence with some special environment. There is, first, physical or temporal death, which is simply separation from this present outward world, the end of our correspondence with our physical environment. There is, next, spiritual death. Here the environment is God, and death means separation from the light of His love. "To be carnally minded is death" (Rom. viii. 6); "You, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. ii. 1). And, lastly, there is the death to sin, the exact converse of the latter—separation from the devil and his works, through the life that is in Christ Jesus. "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. vi. 11). "He that is dead is freed from sin" (Rom. vi. 7).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.— Verses 12—17.

A Church Flagging in its Duty.—Of this Church there is much complaint, and much need for stern discipline. Two evils were imperilling its very life. Christ deals with them hopefully, because they were yet in their early stages, and undeveloped. Only a few were really bad. Pergamos, or Pergamum (the original of the word "parchment") was in the province of Troas, Asia Minor, some sixty miles north of Smyrna. It was not a commercial city, but its hill formed a natural fortress. It was the seat of the worship of Æsculapius, the god of healing, who was symbolled as a serpent, and represented by a live serpent which was kept in his temple. There is a legend about this god to the following effect: On one occasion, in the house of Glaucus, whom he was to cure, while he was standing absorbed in thought, a serpent entered, and twined round his staff. He killed it, and then another serpent came in, carrying in its mouth a herb with which it recalled to life the one that had been killed. Æsculapius henceforth used that herb, with healing effects, on man. But an elaborate system of magic grew up around this god, attended with deceptive practices. Pergamos became a focus of idolatrous worship, and could be described as the place "where Satan's seat is." Outward

circumstances of *temptation*, rather than of *trouble*, are represented in the picture of this Church. Under pressure of these temptations the Church has partly yielded; but it does not seem to have recognised the seriousness and peril of this partial yielding; and therefore the Living Christ must come to it with the dividing and revealing two-edged sword.

I. **A Church faithful to the truth.**—"Hast not denied My faith." Antipas was probably the proto-martyr of the Asiatic Churches. "I know thy works." We would like Christ to judge us by our Church *activities* alone; but He always seeks to judge the soul that is behind the activities. Christ takes due account of our disabilities—"where thou dwellest"; but not so much to excuse failure as to show that He expects energy. Only noble souls are put in dangerous places; they are honoured even as is the "Forlorn Hope" of an army. (The "Nicolaitanes of ver. 15 are best apprehended as the *Antinomians* of that day.)

II. **A Church failing from its duty.**—Its practice was by no means so good as its profession. Some were going wholly wrong. Balaam and the Nicolaitanes are introduced as types of the two serious evils affecting this Church. 1. Unrestrained feastings, or self-indulgence in food. The story of Balaam which is specially brought before us here is given in Num. xxxi. 16. Over-mastered by God, Balaam became a revengeful schemer, and taught Balak to show friendliness, and get the Israelites to mix with his people at the idol-feasts, whose great characteristic was riotous self-indulgence. This evil took a refined form in the early Church, and St. Paul had to advise on the question of eating meat which had been offered to idols, if a Christian was invited to a feast by a heathen friend. The difficulty was based on the Eastern idea of communion by eating. Fulness of self-indulgence in eating and drinking still involves the hopeless ruin of Christian piety. 2. Unrestrained passions, or self-indulgence in sexual relations. In Balaam's day this over-feeding, and these idol associations, led to sadly immoral relations between Israel and Moab—relations that were in open and wilful opposition to the conditions of the Jehovah-covenant. In connection with this, bring in the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which supported immorality by its assertion that self-indulgence is not sin in the regenerate. There have been known cases in which men who were living in open immorality have persisted in coming to the Lord's Table. But such men always have been, and are to-day, the canker of the Church. The sign that a man is a saved man is his wanting to be righteous, and trying to be righteous. A Christian absolutely *must be* self-restrained in matters of bodily appetite and passion.

III. **A Church encouraged to become steadfast in holy living.**—"Eat of the hidden manna," to satisfy the feast-feeling. The figure may be based on the legend that Jeremiah hid the Temple pot of manna. Manna is Divinely-provided food—spiritual food. The addition of "hidden" makes it clear that it was not *such* manna as was provided for Israel—not something to satisfy merely bodily appetite. The point is this: overcome, and hold in wise restraint bodily appetite, and Christ's reward will be the culture of spiritual appetite, with abundant supply of spiritual food. "White stone and new name," to satisfy the love for human relations. When houses of public entertainment were less common, private hospitality was the more necessary. When one person was received kindly by another, or a contract of friendship was entered into, the *tessera hospitalis* was given. It was so named from its shape, being four-sided: it was sometimes of wood, sometimes of stone. It was divided into two by the contracting parties; each wrote his own name on half the *tessera*. Then they exchanged pieces, and therefore the name or device on the piece of the *tessera* which each received was the name the other person had written on it, and which no one else knew but him who received it. It was carefully prized, and entitled the bearer to protection and hospitality. The idea is, that human friendships

and relations should become wholly pure, freed from carnal strain, sanctified, heavenly, the friendship of purified souls. "In heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels." Overcoming carnal tastes will surely go with culture of the spiritual tastes, so that we shall prefer the "hidden manna," and see glory in the "white stone." Every Christian, and every Christian Church, is expected to wear the "white flower of a blameless life."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver 14. *Doctrine of Balaam.*—"Things sacrificed to idols," εἰδωλόθυτα." Every convert from heathenism would acknowledge that he was bound to abstain from any participation, direct or indirect, in the false worship which he renounced at baptism. But the question, What acts involved an indirect participation? was one that gave rise to a perplexing casuistry, and yet could not be avoided. Was the convert to go out of the world, and turn from all social gatherings but those of his own community? Was he to refuse to join in the public meals, at inns, or elsewhere, which travel made almost indispensable? If he did so refuse, he cut himself off, not only from the pleasures, but from the duties and opportunities of family and social companionship. Yet if he accepted the invitation, there was the risk that he might be eating of the flesh of sheep or ox which the host had himself sacrificed, as a festive thank-offering, to Zeus or Apollo, or that the wine which he drank might have been poured out as a libation. If he did so eat, was he not, in "eating of the sacrifice," a partaker in the worship, eating the flesh and drinking the cup which belonged to the demons that he had learnt to identify with the gods whom the heathen worshipped (1 Cor. xi. 20). Yet another case presented itself, which followed the convert even to his own home. Of the sacrifices that were offered in heathen temples the greater part became the perquisite of the priests. When they had more than they could consume themselves, they sold it to the meat-dealers of the market. The Christian convert, therefore, could never be sure that what he bought had not been thus offered, and the sensitive conscience was harassed with the tormenting thought of an unknown and involuntary transgression, which yet brought with it defilement and condemnation. The Jew might avoid the danger by dealing only, as for the most part, Jews deal now, with a butcher of his own persuasion; but this implied a more settled and organised society than that of most Christian communities in the early days of the Church's life, and many years would probably pass away before the convert was able to meet with a Christian butcher. On the other hand, in most cases the Jewish butcher would probably refuse to supply him; or, if that were not the case, would only do so under the restrictions (to the Gentile burdensome and vexatious) of the Mosaic law of clean and unclean meats. (See the discussion of this difficulty in 1 Cor. x. 14-33.) Those who are condemned by this message are precisely those whom St. Paul urges, on grounds of a moral expediency so high that it becomes a duty, to refrain from the exercise of the right and freedom of which they boasted. It was to be expected that some, in their self-will, would harden themselves against the appeal; that they might even use St. Paul's name, and boast that they were more consistent with his principles than he was himself. This, we know, was what Marcion and his followers actually did when they claimed a true liberty for themselves; and Marcion may well have had forerunners among the Gnostics of the apostolic age.—*Dean Plumptre.*

Ver. 17. *The New Name.*—The giving of new names is not uncommon in the bible; *e.g.*, Abraham—Israel—

Boanerges—Peter. The new name expressed the step which had been taken into a higher, truer life, and the change of heart, and elevation of character, consequent upon it. Such are known in the world by their daily life, their business, their character; they are known above by the place they hold, and the work they are doing in the great war against evil. No man knoweth the characteristics of the growth of the character, the spiritual conflict in which the work is done, and the features of that change which has been, and is being, wrought, except he who experiences the love, the grace, and the tribulation, by which his spirit-life has grown.—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 18—29.

Praise and Blame for Thyatira.—Lydia, the first Christian convert in Europe, was a purple-seller of this city of Thyatira, which was famous for its dyeing works, especially for purple or crimson. Inscriptions found on the spot bear witness to the existence of a guild, or corporation, of purple-sellers, with which Lydia may have been connected. The city stands on the river Lycus, and it is situated on the borders of Mysia and Ionia, a little to the left of the Roman road from Pergamos to Sardis. It was founded by Seleucus Nicator after the Persian Empire had been destroyed by Alexander the Great. From the names that appear on their monuments, the inhabitants seem to have presented a greater mingling of races than was commonly to be found, and included Macedonians, Italians, Asiatics (in the narrower sense of that word as including the inhabitants of the pro-consular province of Asia), and Chaldæans. The chief object of their cultus was Apollo, worshipped as the sun-god, under the Macedonian name of Tyrinnas. An interesting discovery, in connection with the religious rites of the city, materially helps in explaining the allusions made in the epistle. Outside the walls stood a small temple dedicated to a Sibyl, a woman who was supposed to have the gift of prophecy. This temple, or church, was in the midst of an enclosure, called the "Chaldæan's Court," and the Sibyl, who was called *Sanbethe*, is sometimes said to be Jewish, sometimes Chaldæan, and sometimes Persian. The inference to be drawn from this is, that some corrupted Jews of the dispersed tribes had introduced from Chaldæa or Persia a religion which was a mixture of Judaism and heathenism. It is not improbable that this Sanbethe, or her school, had at Thyatira a place dedicated to the promulgation of a religion which was an admixture of Orientalism and Judaism, with some importations from the Greek and Roman rites, and even with some kind of appropriation of Christian ideas, forming altogether a system similar to those which the various sects of Gnostics soon afterwards established. And, this supposition being correct, it is then easy to see how Jewish Christians of the Church of Thyatira might be affected with this heresy, and fail to offer to it the opposition which it ought to have received from a Christian community. Dr. Tristram describes the present city, and its surroundings, as seen when approaching it from Pergamos. "Diverging a little to the right, the broad valley of the Hyllus opens to view, and as we look down in spring or summer, we see before us a panorama resembling in kind, though not equal in extent and grandeur to, the traveller's first glimpse of Damascus. The eye tracks across the plain the silver thread which marks the course of one of the effluents of the Hyllus; and in the centre are the crowded white roofs of a widespread Turkish city, with here and there a minaret towering in the midst, and many a clump of tall cypresses raising their funeral plumes on high; while the whole is girt with a fringe of orchards, and watered gardens, over which the silver mist, drawn down by the sun, hangs in a thick, quivering cloud. This is *Akhissar*, 'the white

castle,' the ancient Thyatira." That city, or rather the Christian Church in that city, was in the immediate Divine inspection. All about the rites of Apollo, and all about the seductions of Sanbethe, was known to Him who "walketh among the golden candlesticks." We may see (1) the form in which the Living Christ is presented in His relation to this Church; (2) the things in the Church life which He could commend; and (3) the things which caused Him grave anxiety, and called for His severe reproof.

I. **The form in which the Living Christ presents Himself to this Church.**—The *general* symbolical appearance of the Living Christ, as present in His Church, is given in the first chapter, and certain portions of the description are taken to indicate the special relation of the Living Christ to each particular Church. We Westerns speak so little in the language of symbols, that it is often difficult for us to understand them, or to get their precise adaptations. Two things in the figure of the Living White One are recalled to mind in presenting the message to Thyatira: "Who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass," or burnished brass (R.V.). In the first chapter the symbol is given in a fuller form: "His eyes were as a flame of fire, and His feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace." The eyes of flame seem to indicate a severity of inspection; and the feet like burnished brass may indicate the determination to tread down the evils which the searching eyes may discover. "The feet of *Chalcolibanus*"—that is the peculiar word used—"shall crush the enemies of God as though they were the vessels of a potter." Dean Blakesley thinks that the special description was determined by the character of the worship of Apollo in this city. He thinks there was a statue of Apollo, of gold and ivory, or of wood or marble, richly gilt; that this shone with a dazzling brightness, and that the "eyes like a flame of fire, and the feet like fine brass" were meant to present the image of the Lord of the Churches as yet more glorious and terrible. There is certainly a tone of *severity*, as well as of searching, in the epistle. A purpose to burn up, and tread down, the moral evils which were so seriously imperilling the life of the Church. There are some evils in Church life which must be dealt with vigorously. No gentle hand will do. They are corrupting forces, and must be trampled down. If we may take the idea of this prophetess *Sanbethe* morally corrupting the people with her idolatrous and immoral system, we can well understand that Christ's inspections of that Church must be as with a flame of fire, and His dealings with that Church as the treading of burnished feet. We should never hesitate to associate the holiest severities with the Lord Jesus Christ. The very perfection of love makes it stern and severe against all wrong-doing, and especially against all evil that is doing an actively corrupting work. Its activity must always be met by a more than answering activity of goodness, in resisting and rooting it out.

II. **The things in the Church life at Thyatira which the Living Christ could commend.**—It is interesting to notice that they were very much the things which St. Paul could commend in writing his letter to the Philippians. "Loving ministrations, patient endurance, warm-hearted faith, the more feminine graces of the perfect Christian character." But when this is seen, the *sternness* of the closing portion of the epistle to Thyatira is explained. The Church needed to be aroused. The sterner, masculine graces were called into exercise by the Church's peril. It is a serious mistake for a Church to develop "active" graces to the neglect of the "passive"; but it is as perilous a mistake for a Church to settle down into the enjoyment of Christian peace and Christian privileges, heedless of moral evils that may be making serious inroads upon it—as perilous a mistake to develop only "passive" graces, feminine graces, to the neglect of those that are manly, active, and strong. There is a righteous zeal against evil which Churches should exhibit; and Christ puts

into His Church the power and the right to judge and condemn. These are the things in the Church at Thyatira upon which the Living Christ can look with complacency. "I know thy works, and thy love, and faith, and ministry, and patience, and that thy last works are more than the first." Three things seem to be expressed in these terms: 1. Service; 2. Character; 3. Growth. 1. *Service.* The Living Christ saw this Church realising the ideal of a Christian Church in its "works" and "ministry." The works may, indeed, suggest "good conduct" as the expression of sincere and active faith; but it seems better to take it as meaning works of charity, and works of witness for the truth in Christ. Then "ministry" would mean loving readiness to serve and help one another in all the various anxieties, distresses, sufferings, which constantly come into the human lot, and which even made a special experience in those early Christian days. That is always commendable in a Christian Church. Its members ought to "love one another" in the sense of being ever ready to minister to one another. And its members ought all to recognise that they are put in trust with the gospel, and are bound to witness to it by attractively holy living, and by all gracious persuasions. In the Church of Christ, the voice—the inspiring voice—of the Living Lord should ever be heard saying, "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain. This is praiseworthy. Thyatira was a working Church; it was found working in all-loving ministries, *within* its circle, and in all loving service *beyond it.* 2. *Character.* Three words are used to indicate their high level of Christian attainment, but all three belong to the *feminine*, or passive, graces: Love; Faith; Patience. If we find other names for them, we may call them Gentleness; Dependence; Submission;—the very things that are essential to all Christian character that can be called "beautiful." Things that give the Christian professor a certain kind of strength—a very admirable kind of strength, but not precisely that kind of strength which is required in dealing with public evils, moral evils. Christ's commendation ever rests upon gracious character. Of that we may be sure. It is, indeed, one supreme purpose of the communion of saints to cultivate saintliness of character, the "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord" or win the loving approval of Him who is ever walking amid the candlesticks. The Church's concern is the *character* of its members. The Church's safety lies in the *character* of its members. The Church's power is the witness made by the *character* of its members. 3. *Growth.* This is indicated in the singular expression, "and that thy last works are more than the first." This was a great thing to say. For a Church to stand still is for a Church to go back. Its only security lies in its keeping going forward. It is full of comforting for *this* Church at Thyatira that Christ could recognise advance and growth; because *that* is precisely what both Churches and individual Christians are usually altogether unable to recognise for themselves. They cannot institute befitting comparisons. To them the past of Christian life and feeling is apt to loom large, and the present can seldom be estimated fairly. It is full of good cheer for *us*, too, if Christ sees that our present is an improvement on the past; if the last is better than the first. Very encouraging is the Divine estimate of the loving, devout, ministering, and almost saintly, Christians at Thyatira. One almost wishes it had not been necessary to turn and deal so severely with evils which, if not actually *in* the Church, were closely and perilously *related* to it—did, indeed, affect some, and perhaps some of the principal, members of it.

III. **The things which caused the Living Christ grave anxiety and called for His severe reproof.**—We must satisfy ourselves with a general understanding of the mischievous influence that was at work, and not dwell too closely on the figures of speech that are employed to describe it. It is clear that there was some mischief-making Jewish Christian teacher in the town; and it seems to

have been a woman professing occult powers. She is likened to *Jezebel*, and her influence is likened to that of the Phœnician priestess and princess, who brought the degrading rites of Astarte into the land of Israel, and wholly corrupted the people who should have been "holy unto the Lord." Whatever this woman's teachings may have been intellectually—and of that we can form no sufficient judgment—their influence was bad, very bad, morally. She evidently taught that the Christians were in bondage, and needed *liberty*. They were an isolated section of Society, and took no part in the so-called pleasures of Society. They had scruples about their eating, and scruples about their relationships, and they needed to have these scruples put away, and just to be men and women, with passions and pleasures like other men and women; they needed to be able to eat what they liked to eat, and to do what they liked to do. This was the *practical* result of Sanbethe's licentious and idolatrous teachings, permissions, and example. How far this degrading influence had gone does not quite appear. The message seems to indicate that the elder or pastor of the Church, and a goodly number of the members, had kept themselves from the evil influence. The Living Lord says this: "To you I say, to the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as have not known, this teaching." Some, let us hope a great many, were "faithful among the faithless found." *Dean Plumptre* suggests that the "Agapæ, or love-feasts, of the Church were stained, as the hints in 2 Pet. ii. 13, 14, and Jude ver. 12, not obscurely intimate, with the perpetration of fathomless impurities, in which this so-called prophetess was herself a sharer," as well as the leader. What we need to see, is, that idolatry finds, and ever has found, its congenial atmosphere in self-indulgence and licentiousness; that even false and unworthy presentation of Christianity finds, and ever has found, its support in an intellectual and moral *liberty*, which has always tended to generate into *licence*, and that Christianity—the Christianity of Christ—can only live in a pure moral atmosphere, and may always be judged by "the fruits unto holiness," which it produces wherever it is established. The religion which does not tend to make pure lives, pure homes, pure Churches, and pure Society, has no right to be called Christianity. But the point of impression for the Church at Thyatira, which has its practical application for *us*, is this. The evil in its midst must not be left alone. It must not be left to grow into ruinous power. It must be dealt with vigorously, and at once. It must be resisted manfully. The Living Christ lays "no other burden" upon them, but he does lay *that* burden. Relative to the moral evil in its midst, whatever form it may take, every Church of Christ must be *manly*. It must be Christly as the Christ who drove out the money-changers and dove-sellers when they defiled the holy Temple. And they who, striving against all moral evil in their midst, "overcome," have *this* for their reward. The Christian life in them gains the full development; the strong things are harmoniously cultured with the gentle. They win *authority* as well as *submission*; are now nourished all round into the entire image of Christ, and become strong to resist evil, and to witness for purity, as Christ was strong. To him that overcometh is given the "morning star," the sign of victory over all darkness, all night—everything evil.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 20. *Jezebel.*—The best editors decline to adopt the reading "thy wife." The name of Ahab's idolatrous wife is here plainly a symbolical name. Except in Jehu's taunt (1 Kings ix. 22), which need not be meant literally, there is no evidence whatever of Jezebel's unchastity. A great point of this is, however, made in Peter Bayne's poem on Jezebel. It would seem to be the intimate relation which the woman adverted to sustains to the Church that appears to give occasion for the appellation τὴν γυναῖκά σου. The

woman in question, whose proper name (probably from motives of delicacy) is withheld, was evidently one who assumed the office of a public teacher (καὶ διδάσκει), and gave herself out (for so it is said) as an authorised προφῆτις.

Ver. 24. *Depths of Satan.*—The heretics condemned in the preceding verses were doubtless a sect of those who called themselves Gnostics, probably at this time, certainly in the next generation. They contrasted *knowledge* of the "depths," or "deep things of God" (1 Cor. ii. 10), with the faith of the orthodox in the plain, simple doctrines that were openly preached to the world. The Lord answers that the depths of knowledge that they attained were depths, not of God, but of Satan. . . . It is to be remembered that the Gnostic systems of the second century, and probably those of the first also, included a strange mythology of half personified abstractions, and it may be that the Lord rather identifies one of these with Satan than substitutes the name of Satan for that of God. It appears from *Irenæus* that the Gnostics of his time talked of the "deep things of Depth," as well as the "deep things of God." It is curious that the phrase, "the depths of knowledge" is quoted from the great Ephesian philosopher, Heraclitus: possibly it was owing to his influence that such notions found a congenial home in Asia Minor.—*W. H. Simcox, M.A.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1. *Ruins of Ancient Ephesus.*—Let us go with the traveller, as he journeys over the scenes of Asia Minor—of which Homer, Hesiod, Æschylus, and Euripides, sang, and of which Herodotus and Xenophon wrote—scenes of ancient myths, of high adventure, of sacred narrative,—scenes where Pagan mythology recorded its wonders, and where gospel doctrine claimed its triumphs; and let us rest for a moment with him as he surveys, in the ancient district of Lydia, on the borders of the Ægean Sea, a poor Turkish village, bearing the modern name of Aiasalûk. From the eminence upon which that hamlet stands, built of materials in which are constantly to be seen traces of a more dignified antiquity, the eye wanders over immense heaps of chaotic ruin in the valley below. These masses of ancient masonry are partly overgrown by the wild luxuriance of an almost tropical vegetation, and only the serpent, the lizard, and the scorpion, are at home on the spot. The elegant forms of Corinthian architecture, shafts of Ionic columns, and the less graceful remnants of later Roman days, may be traced amidst the inextricable confusion. A considerable river (the Cayster), the waters of which were originally clear as crystal, having broken loose from its bounds, wanders at will amidst the ruins, and converts the whole into a malarious swamp. Here and there a corn-field offers a contrast to the surrounding desolation, yet only serves to make that desolation more marked and emphatic. Among other remnants of the past are the ruins of an ancient theatre, whose circular seats, uprising one above another, may still be traced, whilst numerous arches remain witnesses of its former grandeur. But though the broken masonry is most extensive, not an apartment remains entire. No Christian dwells in its vicinity; there is no certainty as to the site of any one of the buildings which gave to the city its peculiar character. Confusion has done its utmost work. Such are the ruins of ancient Ephesus. Its position and prospects have undergone a total revolution; "the very sea has shrunk from its shores." Everywhere are visible the traces of the spoilers' hand. The columns which once adorned its temples, and which were the envy of the beholder, were removed by Justinian, to ornament the church of Sophia, in Constantinople. Barbarians pillaged all that emperors had spared; and as the traveller gazes upon the fallen fortunes of so much antecedent magnificence, he shudders at the too visible fulfilment of the threat, "I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." While all trace of the temple of Diana has been lost, Chandler relates that he found amongst the ruins of the city an inscription, commencing as follows: "Inasmuch as it is notorious that, not only among the Ephesians, but also everywhere among the Greek nations, temples are consecrated to her, and sacred portions," etc., which strikingly illustrates the address of the town clerk of Ephesus: "Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana" (Acts xix. 35)?

Ver. 7. *Overcoming.*—As on some battle-field, whence all traces of the agony and fury have passed away, and harvests wave, and larks sing where blood ran and men groaned their lives out, some grey stone, raised by the victors, remains, and only the trophy tells of the forgotten fight; so that monumental word, "I have overcome," stands to all ages as the record of the silent, lifelong conflict.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

Tree of Life.—Comparing this verse with Christ's declaration to the penitent thief, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise," *Parkhurst* maintains that the tree of life is not an emblem of any agent through which Christ bestows blessings, but that it symbolises our Lord Himself. So, following out the idea, he points out that the cherubim, after Adam was expelled from the Edenic paradise, were set to guard the approaches to the tree of life: the time had not yet come for Christ to be manifested in the "glory of His work of redemption." In Luke xxiii. 31 we find that Christ alludes to Himself in His attitude of a sufferer as "the green tree"; that is to say, He was under the constant influence of the spirit of God, and brought forth the fruit of perfect holiness in His Divine manhood.

Ver. 8. *Smyrna.*—This celebrated city is situated on the Mediterranean Sea, about forty miles north of Ephesus. It has a population of nearly 130,000, of whom 25,000 are Greeks, 10,000 Jews, 8000 Armenians, and the remainder chiefly Turks. It has twenty mosques, but the Turkish power is declining. The poppy and convolvulus are much cultivated, the latter yielding a valuable drug known as "scammony."

The Beauty of Smyrna.—"The first sight of Smyrna, especially when approached by sea, must produce a strong impression. It presents a picture of indescribable beauty. The heights of Mount Pagus and the plain beneath, covered with innumerable houses; the tiled roofs and painted balconies, the domes and minarets of mosques glowing and glittering with the setting sun; the dark walls of the old fortress crowning the top of the mountain, and the still darker cypress groves below; shipping of every form and country covering the bay beneath; flags of every nation waving on the ships of war and over the houses of the consuls; mountains on both sides of stupendous height and extraordinary outline . . . tinted with so strong a purple, that neither these nor the golden streaks on the water could safely be attempted to be represented by the artist; at the margin of the water on the right, meadows of the richest pasture, the velvet turf contrasted with the silvery olive, and covered with cattle and tents without number;—all this will at once tell the traveller that he sees before him the city extolled by the ancients under the title of the *lovely*, the *crown of Ionia*, the *ornament of Asia.* It will remind the Christian that he is arrived at Smyrna, the Church favoured so much beyond all the other Churches of the Apocalypse; the only city retaining any comparison with its original magnificence. *Ephesus*, the mart of all nations, the boast of Ionia, has long dwelt in darkness, as though she had not been; the streams of her commerce, like her own numerous ports, are all dried up. Where once pro-consuls sat at *Laodicea*, now sit the vulture and the jackal. At *Sardis*, where once a Solon reminded Crœsus of his mortality, the solitary *cucuvaia* awakens the same reflection; and if *Philadelphia*, *Thyatira*, and *Pergamos* continue to exist, it is in a state of being infinitely degraded from that which they once enjoyed. *Smyrna* alone flourishes still. Her temples and public edifices are no more; but her opulence, extent, and population, are certainly increased."—*Arundel.*

Ver. 10. *Faithful unto Death: Polycarp.* When Polycarp, an ancient Bishop of the Church at Smyrna, was brought to the tribunal, the pro-consul asked him if he was Polycarp, to which he assented. The pro-consul then began to exhort him, saying, "Have pity on thine own great age. Swear by the fortune of Cæsar. Repent: say, 'Take away the atheists'"—meaning the Christians. Polycarp, casting his eyes solemnly over the multitude, waving his hand to them, and looking up to heaven, said, "Take away these atheists," meaning the idolaters around him. The pro-consul, still urging him, and saying, "Swear, and I will release thee: reproach Christ," Polycarp said, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He hath never wronged me; and how can I blaspheme my King who hath saved me?" "I have wild beasts," said the pro-consul, "and will expose you to them unless you repent." "Call them," said the martyr. "I will tame your spirit by fire," said the Roman. "You threaten me," said Polycarp, "with the fire which burns only for a moment, but are yourself ignorant of the fire of eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly." Soon after this, being about to be put to death, he exclaimed, "O Father of Thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ! O God of all principalities and of all creation! I bless Thee that Thou hast counted me worthy of this day and this hour, to receive my portion in the number of the martyrs, in the cup of Christ. I praise Thee for all these things. I bless Thee, I glorify Thee by the eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, Thy well-beloved Son; through whom, and with whom, in the Holy Spirit, be glory to Thee, both now and for ever. Amen."

Ignatius.—Having been sent, bound, to Rome, the Roman prefect caused it to be announced that on a given day Ignatius would fight with wild beasts in the Colosseum. Into the building, which would accommodate eighty-seven thousand spectators, we are told "the whole city" gathered to witness the bloody spectacle. When he was in the amphitheatre, turning to the people, as one who gloried in the ignominy which was before him, Ignatius cried out, "Romans, spectators of this present scene, I am here, not because of any crime, nor to absolve myself from any charge of wickedness, but to follow God, by the love of whom I am impelled, and whom I long for irrepressibly. For I am His wheat, and must be ground by the teeth of beasts, that I may become His pure bread." When he had uttered these words, the lions, being let loose, instantly flew upon him and devoured him altogether, with the exception of his larger bones; thus fulfilling his prayer that the beasts might be his sepulchre, and that nothing might be left of his body; Christ receiving greater glory from the sufferings of His servant than would have followed from his escape from the wild beasts. Thus perished one who, a short time previously, feared that he was wanting in love to Christ, seeing that he had not then been thought worthy of the crown of martydom.

Hooper.—Bishop Hooper was condemned to be burned at Gloucester, in Queen Mary's reign. A gentleman, with the view of inducing him to recant, said to him, "Life is sweet and death is bitter." Hooper replied, "The death to come is more bitter, and the life to come more sweet. I am come hither to end this life, and suffer death, because I will not gainsay the truth I have here formerly taught you." When brought to the stake, a box, with a pardon from the queen in it, was set before him. The determined martyr cried out, "If you love my soul, away with it! if you love my soul, away with it!"

A Greek Christian.—"A Turk had prevailed by artifice upon a Greek Christian, twenty-four years of age, to enter his service, abandon his faith, and embrace the tenets of Mohammed when he assumed the costume of a Mussulman. On the expiration of his engagement the Greek departed for Mount Athos, in Macedonia, and was absent about twelve months, when he returned to Smyrna; but, his conscience having reproached him for the act of apostasy of which he had been guilty, he proceeded to the Turkish judge, threw down his turban, declared he had been deceived, and would still live and die a Christian. Every effort was made to prevail on him to continue in the principles of Mohammedanism, by offering him great rewards if he did, and threatening him with the severest penalties if he did not. The Greek, having rejected every bribe, was thrust into a dungeon and tortured, which he bore most heroically, and was then led forth in public to be beheaded, with his hands tied behind his back. The place of execution was a platform opposite to one of the principal mosques, where a blacksmith, armed with a scimitar, stood ready to perform the dreadful operation. To the astonishment of the surrounding multitude, this did not shake his fortitude; and although he was told that it would be quite sufficient if he merely declared he was not a Christian, rather than do so, he chose to die. Still entertaining a hope that the young man might retract, especially when the instrument of death was exhibited, these offers were again and again pressed upon him, but without effect. The executioner was then ordered to peel off with his sword part of the skin of his neck. The fortitude and strong faith of this Christian, who expressed the most perfect willingness to suffer, enabled him to reach that highest elevation of apostolic triumph evinced by rejoicing in tribulation; when, looking steadfastly up to heaven, like the martyr Stephen, he loudly exclaimed, 'I was born with Jesus, and shall die with Jesus'; and, bringing to recollection the exclamation of that illustrious martyr in the cause of his Divine Master, Polycarp, in this very place, he added, 'I have served Christ, and how can I revile my King who has kept me?' On pronouncing these words, his head was struck off at once. . . . The head was then placed under the *left* arm (after the Mohammedan is beheaded, the head is placed under the *right* arm, and in this manner he is interred) and, with the body, remained on the scaffold three days exposed to public view, after which the Greeks were permitted to bury it."

A Brave Boy.—A company of boys in Chicago once endeavoured to force a boy to go with them into a garden to steal fruit. He persisted in his refusal to go with them. They threatened to duck him in the river unless he consented, but he remained firm. His tormentors then forced him into the water, and wickedly drowned him, because he would not steal. There was the true hero, and the genuine spirit of a martyr. One of the local printers furnishes the following paragraph in relation to him:—"His father is one of our most worthy and estimable Norwegian citizens. He is a member of the Evangelican Lutheran Church, His little son, though but ten years of age, had given such true evidences of piety, and he was so intelligent and consistent in every respect, that he had also been admitted as a member of the same church. His seat in the Sabbath school was never vacant, and his

lessons were always learned." It is proposed to erect a monument to his memory. Who will say that children are too young to love and obey the truth? Honour to the noble boy who was willing to die rather than sin against God.

The Young Drummer.—In one of the late wars a little drummer boy, after describing the hardships of the winter campaign, the cold, the biting, the pitiless wind, the hunger and the nakedness, which they had to endure, concluded his letter to his mother with the simple and touching words, "But, mother, it is our duty, and for our duty we will die."

Crowns for Conquerors. — Among the Romans, with other military honours and recompenses, rich and splendid crowns were publicly bestowed upon the illustrious conqueror, and upon every man who, acting worthy of the Roman name, had distinguished himself by his valour and his virtue. In the triumph of Paulus Æmilius, after taking king Perseus prisoner, and putting an end to the Macedonian empire, there were carried before the conqueror four hundred crowns, all made of gold, and sent from the cities by their respective ambassadors to Æmilius, as a reward due to his valour. How beautiful and striking, then, are those promises which assure us that the Saviour shall confer crowns of immortal glory upon His persevering saints, and that before the host of angels and an assembled world!—*Kennett.*

Ver. 12. *Pergamos.*—Pergamos, a celebrated city of Mysia, in Asia Minor, and for one hundred and fifty years the capital of a powerful and independent kingdom of the same name, is situated about sixty-four miles north-west of Smyrna. It was the residence of the Attalian kings, and a famous seat of Eastern learning, having a noble library, containing two hundred thousand volumes. The advantages of its situation, near the sea, and commanding an extensive plain, rendered it a place of great importance. The acropolis, or citadel (which was always the most ancient part, and the stronghold, of Grecian and Roman cities), stands on a hill two hundred feet above the plain, now crowned with its ruins, amongst which those of a castle or fortress, resembling those at Smyrna and Ephesus, covering the whole summit, and including about eight acres, stand prominent. It was built in the more prosperous times of Pergamos, though much of its present form is of a later date. The town afterwards became more extended, and the modern one lies in part on the slope of the hill, but principally in the plain. Among the antiquities of Pergamos may be mentioned the remains of the temple of Minerva, which rose on a high area, and was unrivalled in sublimity of situation, being visible from the vast plain and the Mediterranean Sea. Its columns now lie in a lofty heap. With a descent almost perpendicular, on the north and west sides is a very narrow valley, with a rivulet, over which, at one extremity, the great aqueduct of one row of lofty arches is constructed, and at the other a pile of massive buildings, which, filling the whole breadth of the valley, was the front and grand entrance into an extensive amphitheatre, . . . the most complete edifice of the kind in Asia Minor. Here, at times, by retaining the waters of the rivulet, a Naumachia, or place for the exhibition of a mock sea-fight, was formed; while at others, when the arena was dry, and the stream confined within its narrow bounds, it was used for chariot, gymnastic, and other exercises. Of the site of the royal palace of King Attalus, celebrated for its beautiful prospect (and therefore probably occupying an elevated and commanding position), nothing can be positively asserted. Once there was at Pergamos the celebrated temple of Æsculapius, which was also an asylum, and the concourse of individuals to which was without number or cessation. They passed the night there to invoke the false deity, who communicated remedies either in dreams or by the mouth of his priests, who distributed drugs and performed surgical operations.

Ver. 17. *The White Stone.*—We have here an allusion to an ancient mode of indicating approbation and acquittal, as described by Ovid:—

"A custom of old, and still ordains,
Which life or death by suffrage obtains;
White stones and black within an urn are cast,—
The first absolve, but death is in the last."

This ancient custom was something like our modern balloting, or voting by white and black balls. The White Stone promised by our Lord seems to mean full and complete justification at the great day, through His glorious imputed righteousness. Some interpreters refer to the ancient custom of acquitting an accused person by the jurors placing a white pebble in the balloting box. Thus the Christian, at the last great assize, shall receive, not the black stone of condemnation, but the white stone of salvation, through the merits of Him who died for sinners. The white stone has also suggested the token of triumph allotted to the victor at the Olympic games, entitling him to a triumphant reception on his return home. There is another *tessera*, or white stone—the *tessera gladiatoria*. Before a young man could appear as a gladiator in the great public games, he had to pass through a long and severe process of training. During that time he went under the name of *tiro*, or apprentice. When he

made his first public appearance in the arena, if he proved victorious, he received an oblong tablet of ivory (*tessera gladiatoria*) as a reward and sign of his proficiency, on which was written his name, that of his master, and the day of his first fight and victory. He was then admitted to the rank of the *spectati* (distinguished persons). The name of *tiro* was dropped, and his new name of *spectatus* was inscribed upon his *tessera*. The *tessera gladiatoria* may not be so attractive in itself as the *tessera hospitalis*, but there is no objection to the employment of a symbol by St. John which is used by the apostle of the Gentiles. And, then, it fits the case, which the other does not. There is the change of name, the new name being more honourable, and commanding greater privileges, than the old. And this white stone is given as a reward of victory—of a victory, it should be observed, not in a single brief contest, but which was the crown and finish of a long and self-denying course of discipline.

Ver. 18. *Thyatira.*—"The appearance of Thyatira, as we approached it," says *Arundell*, "was that of a very long line of cypresses, poplars, and other trees, amidst which appeared the minarets of several mosques and the roofs of a few houses at the right. On the left, a view of distant hills, the line of which continued over the town; and at the right, adjoining the town, was a low hill, with two ruined windmills. Thyatira is a large place, and abounds with shops of every description. The population is estimated at three hundred Greek houses, . . . thirty Armenian, and one thousand Turkish; nine mosques, one Armenian, and one Greek church. We visited the latter; it was a wretchedly poor place, and so much under the level of the churchyard as to require five steps to descend into it. . . . We intended to give the priest a Testament, but he seemed so insensible of its worth that we reserved it, as it was our only remaining copy, and bestowed it afterwards much better. Very few of the ancient buildings remain here; one we saw, which seems to have been a market-place, having six pillars sunk very low in the ground. We could not find any ruins of churches; and, inquiring of the Greeks about it, they told us there were several great buildings of stone under ground (which we were very apt to believe, from what we had observed in other places), where, digging somewhat deep, they met with strong foundations that, without all question, have formerly supported great buildings. I find, by several inscriptions, that the inhabitants of this city, as well as those of Ephesus, were, in the times of heathenism, great votaries and worshippers of the goddess Diana. The city has a very great supply of water, which streams in every street, flowing from a neighbouring hill. . . . It is populous, inhabited mostly by Turks, . . . few Christians residing among them; those Armenians we found here being strangers who came hither to sell sashes, handkerchiefs, etc., which they bring out of Persia. They are maintained chiefly by the trade of cotton wool, which they send to Smyrna, for which commodity Thyatira is very considerable. "It is this trade," says *Rycaut*, "the crystalline waters, cool and sweet to the taste and light on the stomach, the wholesome air, the rich and delightful country, which causes this city so to flourish in our days, and to be more happy than her other desolate and comfortless sisters." *Hartley* remarks, "The buildings are in general mean, but the place in which we are at present residing is by far the best which I have yet seen. . . . The language addressed to Thyatira is rather different from that of the other epistles. The commendations are scarcely surpassed, even in the epistle to Philadelphia, while the conduct of some was impious and profligate. The Church thus exhibited a contrast of the most exalted piety with the very *depths of Satan*."

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

VER. 1. **Sardis.**—Modern, *Sart*; once the capital of the old Lydian monarchy, now a village of paltry huts. **Seven Spirits of God.**—Most writers see in this the endowment of Christ with the Spirit, so as to be judge in His Church. But this idea involves unduly pressing the word "hath," which more naturally suggests "hath in control" than "hath in possession." *Stuart* understands our Lord presented here as having the seven presence-angels under His control, or at His disposal—having them as His attendants and the ministers of His will. In whatever sense "hath" is applied to the "seven Spirits" it is applied to the "seven stars." **Art dead.**—Spiritually; a figure for being in a cold and lifeless state (Matt. viii. 22; Rom. vi. 13; Eph. ii. 1, 5; Col. ii. 13).

Ver. 2. **Watchful.**—Wakeful; the opposite of the present drowsy condition of the Church. Lit. "become watching," "become as one who watches." **Things which remain.**—Implying that some things had died out, and that some things were dying out, through neglect and disuse. In getting back energy for flagging things, there might come also restoration of lost things. **Perfect.**—Or up to the standard, "fully done, in weight and tale and measure."

Ver. 3. **Hold fast.**—Compare the counsel to Timothy (2 Tim. i. 14, ii. 2). **As a thief.**—Unexpectedly, so as to find thee in a wholly unprepared state. (See Matt. xxiv. 43; Luke xii. 39; 1 Thess. v. 2, 4; 2 Pet. iii. 10; Rev. xvi. 15.)

Ver. 4. **Names.**—This is thought to imply a Church roll. It may, however, only be a figure for "persons." **Defiled their garments.**—"Clean white garments are very natural emblems of innocence. Hence, to be clothed with polluted garments, *i.e.* garments soiled and stained, is an emblem of a character which is soiled and polluted." (See Zech. iii. 3, *seqq.*) Those are described whose outward lives had been free from impurity.

Ver. 5. **Be clothed.**—Or shall clothe himself (περιβαλεῖται). **Book of life.** Roll, or register, of the citizens of heaven. Names are blotted out of city registers when death occurs, or when crime is committed, and forfeiture of privilege ensues. **Confess his name.**—See Matt. x. 32; Luke xii. 8.

Ver. 7. **Philadelphia.**—Situated at the foot of Mount Tmolus, and named after Attalus Philadelphus, King of Pergamos. It was a centre of the wine trade. **Holy and true.**—ἅγιος, not ὅσιος. It represents the holiness of consecration rather than that which is ethical and indwelling. The word "true" implies that He will be sure to keep His word. **Key of David.**—See Isa. xxii. 22. Access to, and control over, the house of David, *i.e.* the regal house or palace, is plainly designated by the *key*; in other words, *regal dominion* is its meaning. Christ's actual management and control in His Church are implied. **Openeth,** etc.—With reference to occasions and opportunities of service. An opportunity of Christian service should be thought of as a Christ-opened door. In at such doors His Church must be ready to enter.

Ver. 8. **Open door.**—For the figure compare Acts xiv. 27; 1 Cor. xvi. 9; 2 Cor. ii. 12; Col. iv. 3. An opening for some form of missionary work is clearly suggested. The safety of a Church lies more truly in enterprising service than in self-culture. The healthiest Church is the most active one. **No man can shut it.**—So they need not fear the opposition indicated in ver. 9. **Little strength.**—This is praise, not covert blame. "The point is that his strength is not great, not that he has a little left in spite of the strain upon it" (*Simcox*). Thou hast some energy. *Plumptre* thinks "the words point to something in the past history of the Church of Philadelphia and its ruler, the nature of which we can only infer from them and from their context. Some storm of persecution had burst upon him, probably, as at Smyrna, instigated by the Jews, or the Judaising section of the Church. They sought to shut the door which he had found open, and would have kept so. They were strong, and he was weak; numbers were against him, and one whose faith was less real and living might have yielded to the pressure. He had kept the Word unmoved by fear of man."

Ver. 9. **Synagogue of Satan.**—The antagonistic Jewish section; but the term suggests that they were doing their evil and hindering work in a secret and underhand way, as if they were serving Satan, the deceiver. **Worship before thy feet.**—As suppliants in a time of

grievous distress. The idea is that troubles were at hand which would ruinously affect both Jews and Christians, but rest so heavily on the Jews that they would be glad to gain the help and defence of the Christians.

Ver. 10. **Hour of temptation.**—Trial which severely tests faithfulness. Terrible persecutions burst on the Churches, arising from heathen panic and suspicion.

Ver. 11. **Take thy crown.**—That which is reserved for the faithful combatant. "Perseverance is essential to the final reward of the Christian."

Ver. 12. **A pillar.**—A figure from the use of pillars in supporting ancient temples. The classical architecture involves the use of pillars. See Gal. ii. 9. "What pillars are to a temple, literally considered, the like will such Christians as those in Philadelphia be in the spiritual temple built by the Saviour." The idea of established, permanent goodness is suggested. And the man who proves strong under strain is made a strengthener and supporter of others. **My new name.**—Inscriptions were often made on pillars, and they have been actually found on the sides of the four marble pillars which survive as ruins at Philadelphia. The allusion is to the golden frontlet inscribed with the name of Jehovah (chap. xxii. 4; see also ix. 4; illustrate by Exod. xxviii. 36). *Stuart* says: "The name of God, inscribed on one's forehead, designates the generic idea of one devoted to objects and purposes spiritual and heavenly; the name of the New Jerusalem marks the peculiar city to which the conqueror belongs; the new name is that which is peculiar to the Christian as such—to a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. With such a distinction impressed upon him, or at least borne upon the frontlet of his mitre, the conqueror would be recognised and acknowledged by all as entitled to his place in the New Jerusalem."

Ver. 14. **Laodiceans.**—The city of Laodicea was situated on the banks of the Lycus, near Hierapolis and Colossæ. Archippus was possibly the angel of this Church, in the sense of being its chief pastor. Laodicea received its name from Laodice, wife of Antiochus, the second King of Syria, by whom it was re-built and beautified. **Amen.**—Here only used as a personal name. **Faithful.**—In the sense of trustworthy (see chap. i. 5). "*Trench* suggests the three things necessary to constitute a true witness. He must have been an eye-witness of what he relates, possess competence to relate what he has seen, and be willing to do so." But the assertion is here made in view of the severity of the message sent to this Church. However searching and severe, it is assuredly faithful and true. **Beginning of the creation.**—See Col. i. 15. This may mean, the first of a new spiritual creation, or the Author of creation—the material world being conceived of as due to the agency of the Divine Son; or the first created being; or the beginning (in the active sense) of the creation; *i.e.*, the Creator of all things—primary source of all creation. The appropriateness of this declaration concerning Christ comes to view as we realise the special temptations of this Church to the worship of inferior divinities. "Like Colossæ, this Church was exposed to the risks of angelolatry, of the substitution of lower principalities and created mediators for Him who was head over all things to His Church."

Ver. 15. **Cold nor hot.**—*Plumptre* suggests that it was specially exposed to the chilling and enervating influence of wealth. To passionate and intense natures there is nothing so irritating as the "superior" man who can always keep the happy medium, and never gets excited about anything. Wealthy people are especially tempted to take things easy, to take even their religion easy. "The term 'hot' denotes the temper of *fervent* love, a love that warms and animates the whole life, the temper, we must remember, of the apostle who records the message." The term "cold" simply implies the absence of enthusiasm. "The tepid temperature has, as its physical effect, the sickening sense of nausea, and in its moral aspect causes, in most earnest minds, a loathing that is not roused by the state described as 'cold.'"

Ver. 17. **Sayest.**—In a spirit of blind self-confidence. **Rich.**—Lit. "I am rich, and have gotten riches." The repetition implies satisfaction in the riches (Hos. xii. 8). **Wretched.**—The worst kind of hypocrites—hypocrites without knowing it. There is no more subtle peril than self-deception concerning our spiritual condition—the self-deception that comes of self-confidence.

Ver. 18. **Buy of me.**—There is perhaps a touch of irony here. **Gold tried.**—Lit. "fresh burnt from the fire." **Eye-salve.**—*Collyrium* was the common dressing for weak eyes.

Ver. 19. **Rebuke and chasten.**—See Prov. iii. 11; Heb. xii. 5. **Zealous.**—Implying rousing themselves out of their careless, lukewarm temper.

Ver. 20. **Stand at the door.**—Compare Song of Solomon v. 2.

Ver. 21. **My throne. . . . His throne.**—Both to be treated as figures. "The promise of sharing the throne is the climax of an ascending series of glorious promises, which carry the thought from the Garden of Eden (chap ii. 7) through the wilderness (ver. 17), the temple, (chap. iii. 12) to the throne." The conquerors in the strife are, "in some sense which we cannot as yet fathom, made partakers of the Divine Nature" (2 Pet. i. 4)—sharers in the holiness, the wisdom, the love, and therefore in the glory and the majesty, which have been from everlasting."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—6.

Death and Life and Peril of Life in a Christian Church.—There is scarcely more than a doubtful allusion, in this epistle, to the secular or religious conditions of the city of Sardis. That some of the members of the Church had not "defiled their garments" implies that there was some peculiar peril of moral defilement in their daily associations. There are ruins of a stately temple still remaining, which was dedicated to the mother-goddess Cybele; and her "worship, with its eunuch priesthood and its orgiastic rites, was one which tended, as much almost as that of Dionysos or Aphrodite, to sins of a foul and dark impurity." The city was a very interesting one. It was famous for its purple dye, for its coinage, and for the manufacture of a compound metal, known as *electrum*. It was the ancient capital of the Lydian monarchy, and through its *agora*, or market-place, flowed the Pactolus, with its golden sands. But this epistle directs exclusive attention to the Christian Church in Sardis, and it is chosen as one of the seven Churches to receive direct messages from the Living Christ, because it was, in some way, a typical, or representative, Church; and in connection with it may be illustrated the universal Divine dealings with Churches that answer to this type. In what, then, is this Church a type of certain Christian Churches which may be found in every age? Its most marked peculiarity, the consequences of which the searching Spirit of Christ discovers and brings out to view, is, that the Church had been left for years in quietness and peace. It had not been touched by any of the persecutions that had afflicted sister Churches. The members lived as citizens in the esteem of their neighbours, not rousing opposition by any active resistance of the heathenism around, but, perhaps in an exaggerated and unworthy way, "following peace with all men." The apparent consequence was a look of well-to-do-ness; a general prosperity; much orderliness of public service; fair charities; and conditions that seemed to indicate healthy Christian life. Sardis had the name and repute of a living Church. But there are peculiarly subtle influences always bearing upon individuals, and nations, and Churches, that go on a long time in undisturbed and prosperous quietness, with no changes to put virtue to the proof, and no warfare to put noble qualities to exercise. The supreme moral peril for a man is found in years of continued and unqualified worldly prosperity. The supreme test of a nation comes in prolonged periods of peace. And Churches that never know storm, or stress, or strain, are in grave danger of dropping down into listlessness and worldliness. The one thing that the individual, the nation, and the Church, lose in periods of unbroken outward material prosperity, is *spiritual life, soul life.* Bodily life, material life, social life, thrive well under such conditions, and they may come even to simulate, or stand instead of, spiritual life; but souls grow in times of conflict and trial. Pressure of distress, affliction, or evil, forces the soul into the activity in which alone it can thrive. Of some it is said in God's Word, and in a very striking way, "Because they have no changes, therefore they forget God." Life—soul life—cannot do with long-continued smoothness and ease. The law is an ever-working one, "Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom."

> "The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
> Leads to the place where sorrow is unknown."

The prophet Jeremiah illustrates the truth by a very suggestive figure: "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity; therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed" (Jer. xlviii. 11). The Church in Sardis, then, is a type of those Churches that have known years

of unbroken outward prosperity and peace. We always are disposed to make mistakes about such Churches, and to over-estimate their spiritual condition. The Living Christ, who "walketh among the candlesticks," makes no mistakes. Let us see what He may be finding, to-day, to be the truth concerning *such* Churches, by what He found to be the actual, rather than the apparent, state of the Church in Sardis. In dealing with the previous Churches, we have seen that, in each case, the Living Christ is pictured as present in a precise relation to the conditions and needs of the Church. That is equally true in this case. We have to be assured that He is never deceived, or carried away by mere appearances. He goes in behind the show of things to the inward reality. He can searchingly search. He can deal with motives. He can test for signs of spiritual life. So He is figured, in relation to Sardis, as having the seven Spirits, or the perfect Spirit of God. He has the Divine eye, which the psalmist felt "searched and knew him," and which the Christian teacher spoke of as "discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart." The Church in Sardis might be so satisfied with itself that it would find it hard to believe it could be as Christ declared it was. Let them know, then, that the Living One, who moved among them, saw secrets with absolute precision, for He had the seven Spirits of God. There can be no appeal from His searching inspection, and unhesitating decision. But that is not all the figure in which Christ is presented to this Church. He is also "He that hath the seven stars." Now, the "stars" are the angels, or ministers, of the Churches; and this allusion to the Living Christ as having, or holding, the stars in His right hand, is evidently intended to suggest that He meant to subject the minister of this Church in Sardis to an unusually searching test. It was possible that he might be found as spiritually dead as were the average of the members of the Church. It might even be that his yielding to subtle, worldly influences had sealed the spiritual death of the Church. "His faith, as well as the faith of the Church, may have sunk into a superficial, though perhaps an unostentatious, state." And if so, it was well that the Divine rebukes should seem, in a very direct way, to be pointed at *him*. In the inspection of this Church notice—

I. **The Living Christ does not stop with mere signs of life.**—There is almost an abruptness in the way in which they are mentioned, and brushed aside. "I know thy works, that thou hast a name, that thou livest." "These things bring you men's praise, and even men's confidence, but I am not interested in them; I want to know what is behind them." The show and the fame of Christian life is not always a genuine expression of spiritual life. Many a consumptive patient makes a brave show of life when he is just dropping into the grave. Other things besides spiritual life can secure the commonplace goodness of a man, and of a Church. A moral man may not be a Divinely quickened man. An apparently healthy Church may have really lost its vitality. The leaves of the tree do not fall at once when the fresh springs of sap are stopped in their flowing. Presently, if there be no sustaining life, the signs of life will surely fail. But when the Living Christ searched the Church in Sardis, and its minister, the evil, the spiritual death, was only in its beginnings. The tone of His address is more than usually severe. The conditions were subtle. The discovery of the insidious evil was physician's work. The seeming flush of health really was but the hectic flush of disease. The very little, dull, but steady, pain and swelling, of which no notice was taken, was the sign of cancerous growth, and a living death. Signs of life in a Church! Services maintained; numbers increasing; propriety of conduct winning public respect; generous meeting of responsibilities; service of charity to the poor; kindly sympathies with one another in times of sorrow;—Christ, the Living Christ, passes them by, with a glance of approval; they are good as far as they go. He goes in behind them to test the vitality,

the spiritual life, of which they should be the expression. And He may have to say, "I know thy works; thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead." "In Sardis there had been no open scandals. It was still recognised by the other Churches as a living and true member of the great family of God—was even, it may be, winning their admiration for its seemingly energetic vitality. And yet the chill and the paralysis, which were the forerunners of the end, were slowly creeping in upon its life; death, not life, was already master of the position, the dominant characteristic of the Church as a whole, and perhaps of its spiritual ruler in particular" (*Plumptre*).

II. **The Living Christ is anxious about flagging life.**—Nothing can be done by agencies within the Church's control for those in the fellowship who are quite spiritually dead. There is no hope for them, save in the awakening trump of some direct Divine dealing. But, while this may be the condition of a few, the Living Christ fixes attention on those whose vital force was but failing—who were but beginning to die. And the searching Eye noticed that it was on certain *sides* of Christian life that they had begun to die, as trees show signs of hastening death in particular branches. This, however, only made their spiritual condition the more perilous, because they might easily be satisfied with the things into which spiritual life still streamed, and might fail to see the significance of the death that was doing its work in *other* things. When we live, crediting ourselves with, and getting the credit of, superior piety, it is very easy to blind ourselves to the actual conditions of spiritual peril in which we are found. But there is hope in dealing with those whose spiritual life is only flagging. The Living Christ bids them "establish the things that remain" alive, but "are ready to die." He tells them that He had not found their works perfect, they were not good, not alive, *all round* the tree, and the death in some of the branches would inevitably spread to all the other branches. And He solemnly warns them—with a most arousing warning—that when deadly disease stealthily creeps upon a man, and is left unchecked, it has a way of *leaping* upon him at last, and clutching him with one hopeless grip. They will find it even so with flagging, diseased, deteriorated, spiritual life. "If, therefore, thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." *Plumptre* says: "The angel of the Church is called to wake up from his slumbers, and then to strengthen in himself the energy, the zeal, the love, the hope, the faith, which were so nearly dying out. In doing this he could not fail to help the persons, also, in whom this flagging of all spiritual vigour had been most conspicuous, or, in the language of the epistle to the Hebrews, 'to lift up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees.'"

III. **The Living Christ recognises those in the Church who are truly and healthily alive.**—For such there always are, even in a spiritually decaying and dying Church. The Lord always has His "remnant." In a prosperous Church they are often found among those who are poor in this world's esteem. And almost always they are found among the severely *afflicted* ones—those who have the trials and persecutions in their own personal experiences, which the Church, as a Church, may so perilously lack. They are always the *salt* of the Church, the hope of the Church. And they are sure to gain the loving recognition of the Living Lord who "walks among the candlesticks." But the description given of the sign of life in them which their Lord recognises is singular and suggestive. "Thou hast a few names in Sardis which did not defile their garments." They walked the foul highways of immoral Sardis clean. But the suggestion is not one of merely careful, watchful walking—one of mere ordering of conduct and relationship. It reminds us of Christ Himself, who walked the earth in spotless white, though He touched the leper and ate with sinners. He had such vigorous life in Him that neither His soul nor His body *could take stains.* That is the

idea of the undefiled few. They have such vigorous spiritual life that as they go to and fro among defiled men and things they take no stains; they throw off all infections; cleanness and health are guaranteed to them by *vigorous life*. And these shall "walk with Christ in white." They shall come into such a near and sympathetic fellowship with Him as only they can know who are alive as He is alive. If it be true that death creeps on from a spot to a limb, and from a limb to a vital organ, we need not miss seeing the answering truth—that life is active to resist encroaching death. Every really living Christian in a Church is an active, energetic power. The undefiled few preserve, as does the *salt*; they work as does the *leaven*; they spread as does *life*; they fight evil and death, even as the White One Himself ever did, and does. The hope of every Sardis lies in her present, searching Lord, and in her "undefiled few."

IV. **The Living Christ encourages effort to recover life by giving gracious assurances and promises.**—"To him that overcometh" the stealthy, insidious influence of this prolonged Church prosperity and peace, that braces himself to resist the evil, and nourishes his soul-life into healthy vigour and activity, these assurances come. "He shall be arrayed in white garments"—a fitting array for the white-souled, and for the servants of the White Christ. Their whiteness shall come out and clothe them, and so take the attention of men and be a powerful witness for Christ. Their "name shall not be blotted out of the book of life," as the names of the *dead* citizens must be, and the names of the *dying* citizens are in peril of being. And the Living Christ shall find His personal pleasure in them. He shall speak about them to His Father and to the angels; glad in those who are quick, and strong, and healthy, in that Divine life they have through Him. "I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels." "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith" unto the Church in Sardis. Beware, lest any of you succumb to the oppressive moral atmosphere that is around the Churches of Christ in these days of national prosperity, wealth, worldliness, and peace. In that atmosphere, spiritual life finds it hard to thrive. It has this subtle influence upon us: it nourishes self-indulgent life, mental life, artistic life, and even a sort of philanthropic life; and Churches are so easily deceived with these things, and induced to call them *spiritual* life. And then the real spiritual life moves slowly in the veins of the Church, and then it becomes stagnant in places, and then it mortifies. He who hath the seven Spirits of God looks at the facts, not at the seeming, and behold, He must say this: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name, that thou livest, and art dead." Dead in places, dying in other places—only a *few* parts really alive. What an alarming picture of a Christian Church! This is the arousing warning given to it: "Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and didst hear, and keep it and repent. If, therefore, thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." Resist the creeping lethargy, arouse yourselves, shake off the sleep of hastening death. Be among those who *overcome* and live, and, because alive, walk the earth with the Living, White Christ.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 1. *A Name to Live.*—It is the reputation for piety possessed by the Church at Sardis which is referred to. Living with the credit of superior piety, it was easy to grow satisfied with the reputation, and to forget to keep open the channels through which grace and life could flow, and to fail to realise that the adoption of habits of life higher than those around them, or those who lived before them, was no guarantee of real spiritual life; for, as *Mozley* says, "the real virtues of one age become the spurious ones of the next. . . . The belief of the Pharisees, the religious practice of the Pharisees,

was an improvement upon the life of the sensual and idolatrous Jews whom the prophets denounced. But those who used both the doctrinal and moral improvements as the fulcrum of a selfish power and earthly rank, were the same men, after all, as their fathers, only accommodated to a new age." Self-satisfaction, which springs up when a certain reputation has been acquired, is the very road to self-deception. The remedy is progress, forgetting the things behind, lest, looking with complacency on the past, moral and spiritual stagnation should set in, and spiritual death should follow.—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

Seven Spirits of God.—The Spirit is thought of, to use the later terminology of the Nicene creed, as the "Giver of life," and of all its sevenfold gifts; the seven Spirits of chaps. i. 4 and v. 6 were but forms of that Divine life which He—one, yet manifold—imparted. He also "hath the seven stars," which represent the guides and teachers of the Church; He is able, that is, to bring together the gifts of life, and the ministry, for which those gifts are needed. If each star shines with its peculiar radiancy, it is because it is under the power and influence of the sevenfold Spirit; if it has no life or light, and ceases to shine, there is the danger of its falling away from its place in that glorious band and becoming as one of the "wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever" (Jude ver. 13).—*Dean Plumptre.*

True Church Life.—The Church to whom this statement was made was that of Sardis, and the remarkable thing is that this strong condemnation is pronounced while yet no flagrant vices are charged upon its members. They appear to have been sound in creed, respectable in conduct; yet, after all, they were dead.

I. **There are certain things which secure for a Church a good name, which yet are no sure indications of spiritual life.**—1. *Numbers may give a name to live while yet there may be death.* 2. *Wealth may give a name to live.* 3. *The absence of immoral conduct is no sure indication of life.* 4. *A sound creed* is no indication of a Church's life, because it may have been departed from, or a Church may put the creed in place of the Saviour, or its members may have gone soundly to sleep upon its sound creed.

II. **A sure indication of life is the fruit.**—"I know thy works." The threefold test of a Church's life is—1. *Works of faith.* 2. *Works of love.* 3. *The patience of hope.* The patience of hope is the work of hope. "If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." This patience is not simply quiet waiting, it is also active perseverance. Hope is the mainspring of effort, and a hopeful Church will be a persevering Church, with no such word as weariness in its vocabulary.—*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*

Ver. 4. *The Undefiled Few.*—To the Church in Sardis the message is one of almost unmingled reproof. Christ is represented as having the seven, or perfect, Spirits of God, therewith looking this Church through and through; going in behind the appearances of life, discerning the beginnings of spiritual death. Sardis was a tree fair to look upon, with leaf and flower; but the blight had stricken it—the blight of worldliness and self-indulgence. But that Eye, which is so quick to detect the evil, is yet more lovingly quick to discern the feeblest traces of good. "Even in Sardis" that Eye rested on an undefiled few, who were steadfast in heart, who were clinging to Him in trustful love, who were trying to walk the soiling streets of Sardis with unspotted garments. Such as they Christ will never pass over in forgetfulness; such true and earnest hearts need great comfortings; they shall have them, if need be, from the very lips of Jesus. To such He says, "They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy."

I. **The undefiled few.**—1. The figure used of unstained garments indicates

those who have not brought disgrace upon their Christian professions by their outward life. This is, indeed, only one of the lowest forms of Christian virtue. 2. But more than this is meant. Sardis was famous, even among the degraded cities of that day, for the abandoned profligacy of its inhabitants. In comparison with those around them, their garments were undefiled. 3. There is yet a deeper reference here. The truly undefiled are they who keep up their integrity of *heart*, amidst all the faintings and fallings of their life.

II. **Their present power.**—In every branch of life, or phase of history, you find God has had a few who were leaders—leaders of thought, opinion, enterprise, active effort, and pure living. These are the salt, preserving the rest from corruption. Such was the service of the few in Sardis.

III. **Their future glory.** — This appears to embrace two things: 1. They who struggle after goodness now, shall find themselves settled in goodness *then* for ever. 2. Above all, these undefiled few shall have a communion with Christ of an extraordinary intimacy and preciousness. "They shall walk with Him in white."

Walking in White.—White can hardly be called a colour. It is the soul of a thing shining through a simple and transparent medium. White shows the purity that a thing is. Illustrated by the white cactus. White is the emblem of innocence for children, and virtue for the redeemed. Illustrate priests in white. Church dressed as Bride—snow, wool, pure spring flowers. The text is in the book of Revelation. Can that book be won for Christian uses? The key to it is white, whiteness. Explain the prologue as a thesis worked out in the book. Compare the gospel of St. John, which has a similar beginning thesis. The first chapter is the vision of the Living, White Christ. He is with His Churches. He finds that they are all *not-white*. He is ever with them, to make them white. He uses the varied forms of earth-tribulation as His agents. As the process goes on through the ages, we get occasional glimpses of the heavenly, and there *some* sanctified wholly. The book closes with the vision of the Holy City for the holy ones, and the cry to Jesus to hasten the perfecting of His work.

I. **We are not white.**—St. John says, "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." It is the fact concerning us all, that we "have not kept our garments unspotted from the world." We could not bear the searching of the full sunshine, or the testing of the spring-time. The White One searches all who are satisfied with themselves—searches words, thoughts, affections, tone, relations. How severe His searchings are, is seen in His messages to the Seven Churches of Asia. Ephesus had left its first love, Smyrna needed tribulation. There were a few things against Pergamos. Thyatira was self-indulgent. Sardis had a name to live, but was dead. Philadelphia had but "a little" strength." Laodicea was lukewarm. However self-satisfied we may be, revealing times are sure to come, which humble us in the dust. This is our severest testing. True whiteness will not take stains, any more than Christ took leprosy. The only thing that can be said of us is, we have not been among stains. Who of us is clean every whit?

II. **Christ is white.**—Let us say, *was* white, that we may feel His was a human whiteness; and that whiteness, kin to us, He has carried above. This is the impression left by the scene of the Transfiguration. This impressed the apostles. They speak of Him as "holy, harmless, undefiled." He "did no sin." This is the point of the vision seen by St. John. God could see no stains on Him, though He walked earth's highway. Man has tried his utmost to find stains on Christ; and what, at the

most, do they ever find? Destruction of the swine, egotism, whip of cords, cursing of fig-tree. Do not say He was white because He was God. He was white as man. Then there must be a secret in His human whiteness. It was His sanctified Will. The blood is the physical life. The Will is the moral life. The blood must be pure. The Will must be right. *Our* trouble is that our Will is not right, therefore stains come and stay.

III. **Christ is working to make us white as He is.**—*He* wants it. It is the aim of His infinite love. In our deep hearts *we* want it. Why do we so love *white* flowers? Have you lost the present, living, cleansing, saving Christ out of your life? Are you only resting in something He once did? Then you have not learned the lesson of the book of Revelation. Then you have not seen the supreme glory of Christ. He *maketh* white. He *is making* white. In two ways. 1. As sunshine make sails look white. 2. As washing makes white paper in the paper mills. The book of Revelation describes God's tearers, and chemicals, and rollers. (1) The great Son cannot bear to see any stains on His brothers. Therefore He refines, as silver is refined, seven times. (2) The great Son wants His own purity for every brother. His is purity *within*. We are anxious about a covering robe. The robe of immortality lets the white (that we have become) shine through. This, then, is Christ's present work in us—His sanctifying of tribulation. He is getting our Wills turned wholly to righteousness. Death-time is the final process in the cleansing of the Will. In recognition of this, we get white wreaths for the dead. Christ's glory for the future is this: we shall be clean, as He is. He can work on to secure that end. He can make us suffer in securing that end. And we ought to respond to His working in us. Triumph for the sin-stained is the Christ-won, everlasting, white robe. What becomes of bodies or of garments that keep on getting stained, and never get washed? It suggests the future of all who are out of Christ.

Ver. 5. *Erasure of Names from the Book of Life.*—"A process of erasure is ever going on, besides the process of entering. When the soul has finally taken its choice for evil; when Christ is utterly denied on earth and trodden under foot; when the defilement of sins has become inveterate and indelible;—then the pen is drawn through the guilty name; then the inverted style (*stylus*) smears the wax over the unworthy characters; and when the owner of that name applies afterwards for admittance, the answer is, "I know thee not: depart hence, thou willing worker and lover of iniquity!"—*Dr. Vaughan.*

Christ's Book of Life.—I. **Christ has His Book of Life, a register and roll of all who shall inherit eternal life.**—1. The book of eternal election. 2. The book of remembrance of all those who have lived to God, and have kept up the life and power of godliness in evil times.

II. **Christ will not blot the names of His chosen and faithful ones out of this Book of Life.**

III. **Christ will produce this Book of Life, and confess the names of the faithful who stand there before God and all the angels.**—He will do this as their Judge, when the books shall be opened; he will do this as their Captain and Head, leading them with him triumphantly to heaven, presenting them to the Father.—*Matthew Henry.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—13.

A Church Above Censure.—Godet says: "No church receives richer praise than Philadelphia, the sixth; it seems as if she had but one step to make in advance to obtain her admittance into the church triumphant." Three facts connected

with Philadelphia may be noted, as having some historical interest: 1. Like Sardis, it had severely suffered from the great Asiatic earthquake in the reign of Tiberius. 2. That of all the Seven Churches it had the longest duration of prosperity as a Christian city, and is still a spacious town, with the remains of not less than twenty-four churches. 3. That of all the seven its name alone appears in the catalogue of modern cities. We may assume that the address was sent directly to, and in precise adaptation to, a particular person, the "angel of the Church"; but he is to be regarded as the embodiment of, and representation of, the whole Church.

I. **A Church with an ability.**—"Thou hast a little strength." And He recognises the "little" who never "breaks the bruised reed nor quenches the smoking flax." The little strength suggests that the Church had been subjected to severe strain, but had not lost its vitality. It had been weakened, but it had not lost hold. The difference between this and other Churches lay in this: the Living One saw them weakening and losing vitality; He saw this one keeping its life and trying to get its full strength. Their light was going out; its light was trying hard to keep in. It is precisely that "little strength" which Christ still looks for. It is the sign of ability; it is a basis of possibilities—a sphere in which Divine grace can hopefully work. Churches cannot but feel the strain of circumstances and persecutions, they cannot but be weakened thereby. But they need not wholly fail. Even under the extremest pressure they can keep a "little strength."

II. **A Church with an opportunity.**—"I have set before thee an open door." That figure distinctly indicated special opportunities for engaging in the missionary work of the Church. It is a special honour for a Church to have such opportunities; but it is also true that in the generous missionary activities of a Church are to be found the best security for its continued vitality. The Church alive enough to do earnest Christian work is alive enough to resist the influence of evil. Recalling the texts in which the figure of the open door is used, *Plumptre* says: "In all these cases the open door refers to the admission of the Gentile converts into the great house of God, the widening opportunities for the mission work of the Church which the providence of God placed in the preacher's way. That phrase must, in the nature of things, have become current in the Churches which owed their very existence to the labours of St. Paul; and when it came to the ear and was recorded by the pen of St. John, it could not fail to recall the same thought and to signify the same thing." No greater sign of Divine approval can come to a Church than the opening before it of larger and wider possibilities of usefulness.

III. **A Church with a security.**—"I also will keep thee." God always is to His people as they are to Him. He meets them, responds to them; is always *as* they are, but always *better* to them than they are to Him. "With the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful." Keep the faith, then; God will keep the promise. The *keepers* will be *kept ones*. "He who had 'kept the word of the endurance of Christ,' the message which bade him endure, should in his turn be 'kept' from (or in) that hour of trial or temptation, the 'fiery trial' of 1 Pet. iv. 12, which was about to spread over the 'whole world' of the Roman Empire."

IV. **A Church with a fixity.**—"Will I make a pillar." The main idea of a pillar is of a thing put to an important and responsible service, and permanently kept to the doing of its work. Goodness is sure to get permanency. And good work, missionary service, shall gain continuity. Nothing shall hinder the work of the Church, and it shall be its joy to *keep at work*. Of this we may always be sure: more work comes as our reward for faithfulness in using opportunities given.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 7. *Key of David.*—Some early commentators saw in this key the key of knowledge which the scribes had taken away (Luke xi. 52), and understood this expression here as implying that Christ alone could unloose the seals of Scripture and reveal its hidden truth to men. In support of this they refer to chap. v. 7-9. The fault of the interpretation is that it is too limited; it is only a corner of the full meaning. He who is "the True" alone can unlock the hidden treasures of truth. But the use of the word "David," and the obvious derivation of the latter part of this verse from Isa. xxii. 22, points to a wider meaning: Jesus Christ is the true Steward of the House of David (compare Heb. iii. 2, 5, 6). The faulty, self-seeking stewards, the Shebnas of Jerusalem and Philadelphia, vainly claimed a right of exclusion from synagogue or church, where Jesus, the God-fixed nail in the sure place, upon which the bundle of earth's sorrows and sins might securely be suspended (Isa. xxii. 23-25), the Eliakim of a greater Zion, had the key of the sacred and royal house. In this the chamber of truth was one treasure, as the chamber of holiness, the chamber of rest, the chamber of spiritual privileges, were others. In other words, though in a sense, the keys of spiritual advantages are in the hands of His servants, "He still retains the highest administration of them in His own hands." The power of the keys entrusted to apostles gave them no right to alter "the essentials of the gospel, or the fundamental principles of morality."—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

True Mora Strength.

I. **Its connection with Christ.**—1. He recognises it (ver. 7). A glorious and faithful description of Christ is this. He is holy, true, supreme. 2. He honours it (ver. 8). He is the key of all spheres, and opens a sphere of usefulness for the morally strong. 3. He imparts it. He is the moral power. All true moral strength is derived from Him. What power He had over circumstances, Society, temptation!

II. **Its influence over error** (ver. 9).—These Jews were of the "synagogue of Satan." He had synagogues then; he has churches and chapels now. The general idea is that false religion shall pay homage to Christian moral power, which comes in contact with it as (1) a morality; (2) an institution; (3) a theology. It appeals to man's craving after self-interests, worship, truth.

III. **Its future reward.**—1. Preservation (ver. 10). The strong in truth and Christ have ever been, and ever will be, supported in trial. 2. Visitation (ver. 11). Death comes to usher us into everlasting blessedness. 3. Exaltation (ver. 12). Three ideas here: 1. Stability—pillar. 2. Utility—a pillar is a support. 3. Divinity—"write upon him the name of My God."—*Caleb Morris.*

Ver. 11. "*Behold, I come quickly.*" Possibly the bishop of the Church at Philadelphia was Demetrius (John iii.). If this is the case, we have before us a holy man, who, probably, was not a very resolute one, and was placed in a position of much difficulty. Such a bishop had, as a rule, two kinds of difficulties to contend with. There was a fermentation of thought on the frontiers of the apostolic Church in which Jewish and heathen ingredients were constantly producing one or another form of so-called Agnostic error—one phase of which is described in the epistle to the Colossians, and another phase in the epistles to Timothy and Titus; and this was a constant subject of anxiety to the primitive rulers of the Churches of the Lesser Asia. Besides those dangers from within, there was the constant danger of popular violence, or of official

persecution, from without. Each Jewish synagogue, and, still more, each heathen temple, was the centre of a strong anti-Christian fanaticism which might at any moment arouse the passions too violently to be appeased with anything short of bloodshed. Demetrius—if he was the bishop—had hitherto made head against the anxieties around him. Hitherto he had kept the Word, he had not denied the name of Christ, he had the promise which past faithfulness always commands, while, at the same time—since no such promise can suspend man's freedom to rebel or to obey—he is warned of the urgent duty of perseverance. If our Lord's words are understood of His Second Coming, it is obvious that we must assume the good bishop of Philadelphia died without witnessing their fulfilment—nay, he has been in his grave for something like eighteen centuries, and our Lord has not yet come to judgment. The event has shown that the predictions uttered by our Lord at the close of His ministry referred only remotely to His Second Coming, and immediately to the destruction of Jerusalem. But this saying of our Lord, "Behold, I come quickly," cannot have referred to the destruction of Jerusalem; and yet, if it meant the Second Advent, the bishop of Philadelphia did not witness the fulfilment of it, and it is still unfulfilled. St. Peter warned Christians that this delay would be used in after times as an argument against Christianity. The scoffers would probably rest rather on the indefinite postponement of Christ's coming, than on any supposed intrinsic impossibility attaching to it. St. Peter meets this by reminding us that God necessarily looks at time in a very different way from that in which man looks at it. To man it seems that an event will never arrive which has been delayed for some centuries, and so that judgment, long apprehended, but long delayed, will not really take place at all, but may well at once be classed among the phantoms of a morbid and disordered brain. With God it is otherwise. Long and short periods of time do not mean to Him what they mean to us. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years." To us "long" and "short" are only comparative epithets; they mean a comparison of some given period of time with some other which we have before our minds. To God a period may be little enough by comparison with the standard of eternity. "Quickly" is a relative term, which may mean one thing when man uses it, and another when it is uttered by the Eternal Being. In death our Lord comes to each of us. There are two things about death which are full of meaning, and which do not admit of any sort of contradiction. The first is the certainty that it will come to each of us some day; and the second is the utter uncertainty of the day on which it will come. When the end before us is so certain, and the date of its approach so utterly uncertain, man's true wisdom cannot be doubtful. It is a matter on which the most clear-sighted philosophy and the most fervid religious faith are entirely agreed: it is to sit easily to the things of time; it is to keep the eye fixed on that which will follow after time; it is, day by day, to untwine the bands and cords which scenes and persons among whom we live here are constantly winding around our hearts, that we may be ready at a short notice to quit them for the world in which all is lasting and all is real. Duty will not be done less thoroughly because done while conscious that this is a passing scene, since, if it is done rightly, it will be with an eye to that higher existence for which it is a preparation. The expected coming of Christ throws a flood of light upon various aspects of human existence. We are struck with the insignificance of life. If Christ's coming means anything, it means the introduction of a life which has no end. The coming of the Lord means that all the wrong-doing and the passions of men, which create so much misery, will have had their day. It means the exercise of man's highest powers to the fullest extent of their capacity, the

beginning of an existence in which thought and heart and Will will rest in perfectly ecstatic satisfaction on their one true Object, and an existence which will last for ever. If a large number of human beings are disposed to look almost exclusively upon the darker side of life here, there are others who regard it chiefly as an opportunity for enjoyment, and often of lawful enjoyment. The pleasures of sense, kept within limits, do promote happiness. But the devotion to the pleasures of sense is an illusion which will vanish at the coming of the Lord Jesus. Many value wealth as a means of gratifying ambition. They value the consideration and respect which are paid to high position. The coming of Christ is the coming of One who has taken the measure of human life, and Who, by His incarnation and His death, has put His own mark and certificate on real greatness. Many devote themselves to knowledge of polite letters. That pleasures of intellect are higher than those of sense, and even higher than those of public life, is sufficiently indisputable. But the seat of true enjoyment or happiness is not in the intellect; it is in the heart. There are those to whom the service of God, manifested in His blessed Son, incarnate, crucified, and risen for man, is the main object of human life—men who, living in this world and doing their duty in it to the best of their power, yet are not of it; men who set their affections on things above and not on earth, and look forward to the day "when He who is their life shall appear," in the humble hope that they too will appear with Him in glory. For them Christ's message is sent: "Behold, I come quickly; hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."—*Canon Liddon.*

Ver. 12. *Monuments in Heaven.*—In every one of the seven epistles to the Churches our Lord describes his correspondents as so many *warriors.* Nothing is promised but to "him that overcometh." What is the promise announced by the Captain of our salvation to him who has bought a sword, and finally achieved a victory?

I. **Some great change must be wrought in men before they could suitably be likened to pillars in a temple.**—More is made in Scripture of the vanity of the soul by nature than of the body by nature. We shall do wrong unless we take the benefit of the contrast between what sin makes us, and what Jesus Christ makes us. If the Christian is a pillar, we must not imagine he is a pillar of support, as being necessary to the temple. The pillars are to be thought of as pillars of commemoration. Monumental pillars were reared in the Grecian cities of Europe and of Asia, within the temples of their gods, to celebrate a battle and announce a victory. The monument was sanctified by the temple, and the temple was adorned by the monument. The simple, bold doctrine of the similitude amounts to this, that a good man, in glory, will preserve the fame of his victories fresh in the memories of eternity; he himself will be the monument of past battles, past conquests. The Christian will live on, to tell his own tale among the ranks of the redeemed. The Christian warrior, in truth, never dies, for, the moment when he drops his sword on the blood-red plains of the Militant Church, without a moment of inaction he passes to chronicle his prowess in the Church Triumphant.

II. **The assertion that the good man in glory will be his own monument must nevertheless, be qualified.**—How far have we got? Only to the point that a warrior in Christ's army shall be, in heaven, a memorial of the battles he fought on earth, just as the pillars in the temple preserved the exploits of the ancients; only with this great difference, that the pillars of antiquity have long since been removed, but the pillars of the Church will remain for ever. But what, after all, is a pillar? Has the marble monument done anything? If you think of the marble is it not wholly and entirely as the workman-

ship of the artist who chiselled and fashioned it? You really look at the characters on the sculpture; you look at the names of the men to whom the marbles are inscribed. When it is said that the Christian will be a monument to himself, what is "himself"? Who is he? Is it to the honour of the man that the pillar will be set up in the temple? What of the inscription on the pillar? If the monument is not for itself, for whom is it? God's name is first on the monument. "I will write upon him the name of My God." Then comes the name of the city of God, the new Jerusalem. And then the new name—"Immanuel, God with us." The source of your victory, the motive of your victory, and, last and best, the Author of your victory. I am to fight the good fight of faith only because upon me, if I conquer, three other names will be inscribed above—God; Heaven; Immanuel. My only, or chief, reward is to be, that I shall display to the myriads of God's creatures the exceeding riches of His grace. This would be no promise to others, but to the child of God it is the sweetest and richest of all.—*Henry Christopherson.*

Gibbon says: "Among the Greek colonies and Churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect—a column in a scene of ruins—a pleasing example that the paths of honour and safety may sometimes be the same."

The Pillar a Monument.—1. He shall be a monumental pillar in the temple of God; not a pillar to support the temple (heaven needs no such props), but a monument of the free and powerful grace of God—a monument that shall never be defaced nor removed, as many stately pillars erected in honour to the Roman emperors and generals have been. 2. On this monumental pillar there shall be an honourable inscription, as in those cases is usual. (Illustrate by the names inscribed on the Arc d'Etoile in Paris). On this pillar shall be recorded all the services the believer did to the Church of God, and there shall also be put the new name of Christ, the Captain of His salvation.—*Matthew Henry.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 14—22.

A Self-Satisfied Church.—The city of Laodicea was situated between Philadelphia and Colossæ. It was either actually founded, or re-built, by Antiochus II., the King of Syria, and named after his wife, Laodĭcé. In St. John's day it was celebrated for its wealth, which was derived chiefly from commerce. In the interest of the apostle Paul, the Church in Laodicea was associated with the Church in Colosse. Neither of those Churches, however, seem to have enjoyed his personal ministry, for writing to the Colossians he says, "For I would have you know how greatly I strive for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh" (Col. ii. 1). He refers to an earnest Christian work which one of His disciples, Epaphras, had done in Laodicea and the neighbouring towns, and the form in which he sends his message to Archippus suggests that this person was the angel, or minister, of the Church at Laodicea (Col. iv. 12-17). The tone of St. Paul's references indicate considerable anxiety concerning the spiritual condition of the Church, and we can well understand that, under the enervating influence of increasing wealth, the evils that he noticed and feared grew into perilous strength in the latter days of St. John, and gave occasion to the most cutting and reproachful of the seven epistles. The key-note to the moral condition of this Church is found in its *wealth.* It was not disturbed by heresies, or broken up by persecutions. Its members were in comfortable circumstances. The services could be maintained without strain, there was nobody in the Church of a contentious disposition to disturb the peace, so they had drifted into an easy-going way, and satisfied themselves with simply

keeping things up to a fair average level. Their full strength went into their weekly money-getting, and they got through their Sabbath obligations and duties as respectably and as easily as they could. It would be very possible to find an instance of just such a Church in these days of ours; for Laodicea is a type, and a type as distinct as either of the others to which attention has been drawn. It is full of suggestion to us that the Living Christ, moving to and fro among the Churches, is arrested by the actual condition of this apparently prosperous Church. It reminds us that He who has the seven Spirits of God is never deceived by the appearance of prosperity in a Church, but searchingly estimates its tone, and mood, and temper, and may thus discover and reveal a condition of things which will altogether surprise the members of the Church, who may expect commendation, and have to receive severe reproaches and warnings. We have seen that some particular feature of the vision of the Risen and Living One is taken, in order to point the application to each Church. Here He who walketh among the candlesticks is figured as "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." Amen is not elsewhere used as a personal name. It means, "verily," and is the firm assertion that a thing is true, and so it can be made a proper name, and stand for Him who is the *truth*. The word the Living One had to speak to this Church would surprise and humiliate it. And the very first response that the Church would make, when it received the message, would be this: "It is not true; it cannot be true." The very possibility of such a response must be anticipated, and guarded against, so the epistle begins with the solemn declaration that it comes from Him who is the absolute and indisputable truth, the "Amen, the faithful and true witness." *Dean Plumptre* thinks that the words "faithful and true witness" should be regarded simply as the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word "amen." It affirms the competency of the Living One to make this testimony, seeing that He combines in Himself all those qualifications which a witness ought to possess. The other form in which the Living One is presented is more difficult to explain. "The beginning of the creation of God." It is probably the solemn assertion of His absolute and perfect knowledge of all things, from the very beginning. From Him nothing is hid. Effort has been made to explain this term by comparing it with the figures found in the epistle to the Colossians—"First-born of every creature," "first-born from the dead"—and by assuming that the Laodicean Church was exposed to the temptation of worshipping inferior principalities. But this is to bring in a set of new ideas, unrelated to the point of the Divine message. He who is truth, sees truly, and witnesses truly, has something to say to which this Church is bound to give good heed, however it may surprise and distress them.

I. **And what is the message?**—1. It is a searching revelation of the Church's unrecognised weaknesses. And the first thing noticed is its *listless indifference*. It was lukewarm about everything. It was dying, as Churches can die, of moderation and respectability. It might, in its apparently sound and safe prosperity, be the envy of other Churches. Its very evenness, its persistently keeping at a dead level, was a supreme offence to Christ. Nobody in the Church brought any disgrace upon the Christian name, but nobody brought any particular honour upon the Christian name. The Church did not make the holy and inspiring witness of consistency in keeping at a high level of Christian attainment and service. It was simply easyful, indifferent, content to go on, aiming at nothing and doing nothing. The "lukewarm are neither earnest for God, nor utterly indifferent to religion. They are perhaps best described as those who take an interest in religion, but whose worship of their idol of good taste, or good form, leads them to regard enthusiasm as ill-bred and disturbing; and who have never put themselves to any inconvenience, braved any reproach, or

abandoned any comfort, for Christ's sake, but hoped to keep well with the world, while they flattered themselves that they stood well with God." Such a state of lukewarmness is unreal and sickly, and yet thinks that it is a true and healthy state. Carlyle calls it "the hypocrisy which does not know itself to be hypocritical." 2. But the Living Christ, in searching this Church, does not stop even with thus showing the fact of its condition. He reveals the root of the evil, in the spirit of self-satisfaction which has gained power in the Church, and has eaten out its heart of love and zeal for Christ. "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing." *Dean Plumptre* says: "The underlying grounds of the condemnation, the secret working of this tepidity of the soul, are brought before us in these words. It is clear that the imagined wealth here is that of spiritual, not temporal, riches. In regard to the latter, the boast would probably have been true, and would have called for no such stern contrast. And yet it is not the less true that it was the possession of the riches of this world that made the Laodicean angel and his Church so satisfied that they had the riches of the other. They took the 'unrighteous mammon,' not only as a substitute for the 'true riches,' but almost as a proof that they possessed them. Outward ease and comfort took the place of inward peace; prosperity was thought a sure sign of Divine approval. We cannot read the history of the Church of Christ, or look around us, or retrace our own experience, without feeling that it has often been so, both with Churches and individual men. Lethargy creeps over them; love is no longer active; material success, multiplied endowments, the power of giving money as the one embodiment of love to God or man—these have been the precursors of decline and of decay." The man who is in a comfortable and well-satisfied frame of mind, because all his material wants are thoroughly provided for, can seldom be brought to believe that his spiritual state can possibly be wrong. And it is precisely the same with a Church that experiences years of steady and unbroken prosperity; it becomes so hopelessly satisfied with its spiritual state, that it resents even the searching appeals of the ever-living Head of the Church. And there is no condition for the individual and for the Church so dangerous as that self-satisfied frame of mind. In spiritual things it has need of nothing. Its spiritual state is quite satisfactory to itself, and unless that self-satisfaction can be broken up, and the truth of its spiritual condition revealed to it, that self-satisfaction will surely bring its doom. 3. With an almost withering severity, the Living Christ declares that the self-satisfaction the Church was nourishing as to its spiritual state was but a sign of its moral blindness. If they could see facts, they would see that, as a Church, they were "poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked. They were not even, as they assumed, keeping to a fair spiritual level. They had sunk low: they had lost tone. They thought themselves rich, but where were their spiritual riches? Could they show them when called upon to do so? Where were their spiritual garments? Could they appear clothed in them when called upon to do so? The Living Christ suddenly calls upon them to bring forth the signs of their spiritual life. They can find none, and now their blindness is forcibly removed, and they are compelled to appear before Him as they are, and to see themselves as they are, poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked. What a humiliation!" The sin of this Church came out of its being too comfortable. It was not serious enough about anything. And this is often the secret of self-centredness. It satisfies a man with his narrow circle of interests—which, like the famous chamber-prison of fable, is ever narrowing and narrowing, until at last it crushes all life worth living out of the man.

II. **And what is the advice given by the Risen and Living Lord?**—"I counsel thee to buy of Me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white

garments that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest; and eye-salve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see." Precisely the work for the sake of which the Living Christ is ever moving among the Churches is the rehabilitation of the spiritual life of the Churches. The condition of this Church was *bad*, but it was not *hopeless*. Something could be done. Provision for the recovery of position, and health, and spiritual tone, were at command. That provision can be supplied only by the Church's awaking from her lethargy, beginning really to care for its spiritual condition, mourning over the condition into which it had allowed itself to drift, and making fresh, direct, personal applications to her Lord for reviving and restoring grace. In his "Holy War" Bunyan pictures Mansoul awakened to recognise the Laodicean state into which it had fallen, filled with zealous anxiety, and sending messengers, with pleading entreaties, to her absent Emmanuel. "Buy of Me," as only we can buy of Christ; with penitence, and zeal, and prayer, and holy yearnings, but without money and without price. "The gold" which Christ will thus "sell" to him who seeks it—the treasure of holiness, and peace, and joy—is that which has been "tried in the fire"; and this, as in all like cases, implies chastisement and suffering. The "white garments" that hide the shame of nakedness, the true holiness of life which alone prevents the exposure of that "inner vileness" of which even the saints of God are ever painfully conscious, are those which have been made white in the blood of Christ, which symbolises suffering. The "eye-salve" which gives clearness of vision, does so, not without the pricking smart that clears away the blinding or beclouding humours. And the counsel is urged by this gracious persuasion; the Living One who rebukes them, loves them, and rebukes them because He loves them. For love can never let sin alone when it finds sin in the objects of its love. And the love that rebukes will not stop with rebuke; it will go on to chastening, it will be followed by discipline that may secure full deliverance from the sin. The very familiar ver. 20 receives its proper explanation only by observing its insertion at this precise point of the epistle. It is usual to sever it entirely from its connection, and to regard it a figure of Christ's seeking admission to the human heart. And that may be justifiable, but it was not in the mind of this writer, nor does it bear direct relation to the subject of this epistle. In *Holman Hunt's* suggestive picture, "The Light of the World" is represented as an august person, artistically and symbolically arrayed, standing with a lamp in his hands under a midnight sky, on the outside of a walled enclosure, the entrance-gate of which is barred. He stands as one who has knocked over and over again, and received no answer; and you observe that the wild vine and bramble have grown over the gate, showing how long and resolutely it has been closed. But in this epistle the Christ is the Living White One standing at the door of a Church. He has come to deliver His searching and arousing rebukes. He stands, as it were, outside to deliver His rebuke; and now He waits—"stands at the door and knocks"—waits to see if the Church will respond aright, and give Him welcome to do His cleansing and reviving work. He will not at once begin His chastenings. They must come if the Church does not fittingly respond to reproof and rebuke. But He will wait—hopefully wait. "Judgment is His strange work, mercy is His delight." He would so much rather work the recovery of the Church with its will than against it. But there is a very remarkable change in the appeal of Christ as He stands waiting. His rebuke and counsel had been sent to the *Church*. His appeal is directly addressed to each and every individual member of the Church. "If any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and He with Me." The responsibility of rightly answering the reproof of Christ is made to rest on each single person. It could easily be shifted off, and made to appear the general duty of the Church. Christ demands that

it shall be the direct answer of each man. The recovery of a lethargic and lukewarm Church is the recovery of its individuals, one by one. The promise to the overcoming soul and overcoming Church is the full enjoyment of the highest spiritual privilege, the privilege that can only be enjoyed by the most spiritually-minded. "I will give to him to sit down with Me in My throne; as I also overcame, and sat down with My Father in His throne."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 14. *Laodicea.*—A Church of which the state is described in the darkest colours, and whose future seems to be compromised. She is threatened with immediate rejection—"Spue thee out of My mouth." There is here more than an expression of indignation; it is one of disgust. Laodicea has fallen as low as a Church can fall, while still bearing the name of a Church.—*F. Godet, D.D.*

Ver. 15. *Hot.*—The heat commended by implication is not the "self-conscious, galvanised earnestness which, in days of senile pietism, passes for zeal. It is an earnestness which does not know itself earnest, being all too absorbed in its work. It is self-forgetful, and so self-sacrificing, rather than ambitious of self-sacrifice. It is, in short, kindled of God, and sustained by converse with the Divine One."—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

Ver. 17. *Self-deception.*—Why should a man repent of his goodness? He may well repent, indeed, of his falsehood, but unhappily the falsehood of it is just the thing he does not see, and cannot see by the very law of his character. The Pharisee did not know he *was* a Pharisee. If he had known it he would not have been a Pharisee. The victim of passion, then, may be converted—the gay, the thoughtless, or the ambitious; he whom human glory has intoxicated; he whom the show of life has ensnared; he whom the pleasures of sense have captivated; —they may be converted, every one of them; but who is to convert the hypocrite? He does not know he is a hypocrite; he cannot, upon the very basis of his character; he must think himself sincere; and the more he is in the shackles of his own character, *i.e.*, the greater hypocrite he is, the more sincere must he think himself.—*Mozley.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Ver 1. *Sardis Famous for Toys.*—"The games of children are pretty nearly the same the world over. Wilkinson has described some of the toys of the ancient Egyptians, found among the ruins and tombs of that remarkable land. Similar remains are found in various parts of Western Asia, the more graceful being the work of the Greek race, and of their nearest neighbours in the western part of the Peninsula. Sardis, the capital of Lydia, was celebrated of old for its manufacture of children's toys, as Nuremberg is in Germany now. In that same region a great variety of articles in terra-cotta are found, exhibiting no little taste in the imitation of nature's models. Miniature horses, cattle, dogs, fish, chickens, lions, and deer, an ass with its pack-saddle, dolls with arms and legs that could be moved by the pulling of a string, comic figures, or caricatures of hunch-backs, deformed negroes, satyrs, and idiots; also whistles, marbles, and many other things in a sufficiently good state of preservation, which compare well with similar products of our modern civilisation. The religion of Islam, indeed, forbids such representations now, yet it cannot prevent little girls playing with dolls, nor boys amusing themselves with mimic horses, sheep, and carts, nor both from eating the sugar birds, horses, and men of the candy-seller, himself a Muslim."—*Van Lennep.*

A few mud huts, inhabited by Turkish herdsmen, and a mill or two, contain all the present population of Sardis.

Ver. 5. *White the Royal Colour.*—Most persons believe that purple was the colour of royal robes in our Lord's day. So the author believed when, riding over the valley of Sharon, he saw a lily in bloom, and was satisfied that it must be a genuine facsimile

of the New-Testament flower. On dismounting from our horse, we found its rich velvet corolla to be of a dark purple. "There," we exclaimed, "is the lily that vied with Solomon in his glory." But careful investigation has compelled us to give up our impression. We are satisfied that the royal colour of all the monarchs in our Lord's day was white. The Persian mingled the blue with the white (Esth. viii. 15; confirmed by Xenophon). Solomon's royal attire, when visited by the Queen of Sheba, was white (*Josephus*, I. viii. 7; Eccles. ix. 8). The high priest, on the great day of atonement, wore a robe of white linen (Exod. xxviii. 2, 40). Mordecai's was blue and white, with a crown (*Cyropedia*, lib. viii. 23). Alexander entered Jerusalem robed in white. Our Lord, in *coronation* robes, appeared in white on Mount Tabor. The kings slain were so many that their robes made the battle-field "white as the snow in Salmon" (Ps. lxviii. 14). Herod's robe was resplendent with silver tissue, woven through the linen (Acts xii. 21; *Josephus*). Angels who appear to Cornelius, and were seen at the sepulchre, were clothed in white, and the saints, advanced to thrones and crowns, wear white coronation robes as kings and priests unto God (Rev. i. 6, iii. 5). "*Shushan*, the Persian word for lily, signifies white" (*Gesenius*). Pilate clothed our Lord in a purple robe (worn of Roman nobility). Herod clothed Him in a white robe (Greek, "gorgeous," or "shining"), Luke xxiii. 11.

Ver. 7. *Philadelphia.*—"We arrived at Allah-Shehr, the ancient Philadelphia. . . . entering the town through chasms in the old wall, but which, being built of small stones, did not appear to be particularly ancient: the passage through the streets was filthy in the extreme, though the view of the place, as we approached it, was extremely beautiful, and well entitled to the appellation of the 'fair city.' . . . We walked through the town, and up to the hill on which formerly stood the acropolis. The houses were mean in the extreme, and we saw nothing on the hill but some walls of comparatively modern date. On an adjoining hill, separated from the first by a deep fosse, or a narrow ravine, were similar fragments of walls; but we observed a few rows of large square stones just appearing above the surface of the ground. The view from these elevated situations was magnificent in the extreme; highly cultivated gardens and vineyards lay at the back and sides of the town, and before it one of the most extensive and richest plains in Asia. The Turkish name, 'Allah-Shehr'—'the city of God'—reminded me of the Psalmist: 'Beautiful for situation is Mount Zion,' etc. We returned through a different part of the town, and, though objects of much curiosity, were treated with civility; confirming Chandler's observation that the Philadelphians are a 'civil people.' It was extremely pleasing to see a number of turtle-doves on the roofs of the houses; they were well associated with the name of Philadelphia. The storks retain possession still of the walls of the city, as well as of the roofs of many of the houses. We called upon the bishop at three o'clock, who received us with much kind attention. . . . At five o'clock we accompanied him to his church; it was Palm Sunday, and the service extremely long. I could not help shedding tears at contrasting this unmeaning mummery with the pure worship of primitive times, which probably had been offered on the very site of the present church. A single pillar, evidently belonging to a much earlier structure, reminded me of the reward of victory promised to the faithful member of the church of Philadelphia—'Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God.'"—*Arundell.*

Ver. 12. *Pillars in Temples.*—Turner, in his "Nineteen Years in Polynesia," records the views entertained by the Samoans in reference to a future state. In that state the *chiefs* were supposed to have a separate place allotted them, called Pulotu. The house, or temple, of the great king of these subterranean regions was supported, not by pillars of wood or stone, but by columns of living men—men who on earth had been chiefs of the highest rank. Chiefs, in anticipation of death, were often pleased with the thought of the high honour which awaited them, of being at once the ornament and support of the mansion of the great chief of their Pulotu paradise. What a striking coincidence have we here with the language of Scripture, and one which throws an additional interest around our instructions, as we read the words of Him who exhorted His people to perseverance by the cheering declaration, applicable to all, high and low, rich and poor, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God"!

Ver. 14. *Laodicea.*—This city was originally called Diospolis, and afterwards Rhoas. It was re-built and beautified by Antiochus II., King of Syria, and named after his wife Laodĭcé, by whom he was subsequently poisoned. In Roman times it was a very principal city among those of the second rank in Asia Minor. It suffered in the Mithridatic war, but ere long recovered; it was also well-nigh destroyed by a great earthquake, A.D. 62, but was repaired by the efforts of its own citizens, who asked no help from the Roman Senate. Laodicea was in

Southern Phrygia, called Phrygia Pacatiana, not far from Colossæ, and about six miles south of Hierapolis. It was distinguished from other cities of the same name by being termed Laodicea on the Lycus. Its commerce was considerable, being principally in the wools grown in the neighbouring district, which were celebrated for their fine texture and rich hue. A village, called *Eski-hissar*, stands amidst its ruins.

Ver. 19. *God's Love in Affliction.*—It is re-related that a poor but worthy inhabitant of Paris once went to the bishop of the place, with a countenance beclouded and a heart almost overwhelmed. "Father," said he, with the most profound humility, "I am a sinner—I feel that I am a sinner—but it is against my will. Every hour I ask for light, and humbly pray for faith, but still I am overwhelmed with doubts. Surely if I were not despised of God He would not leave me to struggle thus with the adversary of souls!" The bishop thus consoled, with the language of kindness, his sorrowing son: "The king of France has two castles in different situations, and sends a commander to each of them. The castle of Montelberry stands in a place remote from danger, far inland; but the castle of La Rochelle is on the coast, where it is liable to continual sieges. Now, which of the two commanders, think you, stands the highest in the estimation of the king: the commander of La Rochelle, or he of Montelberry?" "Doubtless," said the poor man, "the king values him the most who has the hardest task, and braves the greatest dangers." "Thou art right," replied the bishop. "And now apply this matter to thy case and mine, for my heart is like the castle of Montelberry, and thine like that of La Rochelle."

Ver. 20. *Christ at the Door.*—The love of Christ has to come to sinful men with patient pleading and remonstrance, that it may enter their hearts and give its blessings. Some of you may remember a modern work of art in which that long-suffering appeal is wonderfully portrayed. He who is the Light of the world stands, girded with the royal mantle clasped with the priestly breast-plate, bearing in his hand the lamp of truth, and there, amidst the dew of night and the rank hemlock, He pleads for entrance at the closed door which has no handle on its outer side, and is hinged to open only from within. "I stand at the door and knock. If any man open the door, I will come in."—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

Knocking at Doors.—The gates of the rich and the doors of the caravanserais and other large buildings have a knocker made of a bent bar of iron hung by a hinge, so as to strike upon a broad-headed nail. Otherwise there is always a ring set in the door, by which it is pulled to, and this is used as a knocker by striking it against the door with the open palm. Officers of justice rap on the doors with the ends of their staves of office, and some people, impatient of delay, try to make more noise by striking the door with a stone. The sleep of Orientals is proverbially heavy, and loud and repeated knockings at doors are sometimes heard at the dead of night, accompanied by the reiterated shouts of some belated traveller.—*Van Lennep.*

CHAPTER IV.

AN INTRODUCTORY THEOPHANY.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

VER. 1. **Saw.**—Observed, not specially "looked up." **Opened.**—Set open. **Trumpet.**—Chap. i. 10. **Which said.**—The voice is put for the person speaking.

Ver. 2. **In the spirit.**—Implying a rapt state of mind, absorbed wholly in the things now unfolded. Compare St. Peter's "trances," and St. Paul's "visions." "It is implied that he was caught up through the open door into heaven, and saw what was going on above." Compare the conception of Dante's poem. **Throne.**—See 1 Kings xxii. 19. A similar description of the throne of God may be found in the book of *Enoch*, xiv. 17-23. See also Ezek. i.; Dan. vii. He who sat on the throne is not named (see Jewish reticence in relation to the sacred Name), but "He is kept before us in the whole book, to remind us that the great world-drama moves forward ever under the eyes of the ruling One.

Ver. 3. **Jasper.**—The ancient jasper was the translucent stone now known as chalcedony, a dark, opaque green (Exod. xxviii. 20; Rev. xxi. 19). This colour is, however, unsuitable as a description here. In the later reference the jasper is spoken of as "clear as crystal," and then the *brightness* of the jasper blends with the *red glow* of the sardius, which is a red

carnelian, fiery in colour. Together the images denote the powerful splendour which beamed from Him who sat on the throne. Compare Ezek. i. 26, 27. **Rainbow.**—Symbol of Divine mercy, beautiful in itself, and veiling the splendour. **Emerald.**—Green. "The iris is compared to it here, because the modified and mild colour of green apparently predominates in the rainbow." Ancients felt very strongly the relief given to the eye by looking at it.

Ver. 4. **Elders.**—"The representatives of Christ's Church and people—of those whom Christ calls His friends" (John xv. 15). Two sets of twelve. The Christian Church of St. John's day was a *Jewish Christian* Church. The two sections are represented in the one set of elders: not Jews and Christians as distinct bodies. **White.**—Note the importance of this symbol of purity throughout the book. "They are the glorified embodiment and representatives of the people of God." (*Stuart* prefers to explain the number by the division of the priesthood into twenty-four classes which David made.) **Crowns.**—With the robes denoting their king-priestly character.

Ver. 5. **Proceeded.**—ἐκπορεύονται, continually proceed. See the associations of the giving of the Law on Sinai (Exod. xix.). Thunder and lightning are our most impressive nature suggestions of the Divine majesty and power. "By these are signified the instructions of God's law, the encouragement of His promises, and the warnings of His judgments." **Lamps of fire.**—*I.e.* seven resplendent, glorious beings, all radiant, like burning torches, or lamps. Or it may be a symbol of the Divine Spirit, whose sevenfold gifts are spoken of.

Ver. 6. **Sea of glass.**—Figure from the "sea" that was in front of Solomon's temple (1 Kings vii. 23, etc.). This temple has a real sea in front of it. It is suggested that fickle, movable waters represent the unguided, unreasoning, and unprincipled thoughts of men. By analogy, the calm, glass-like sea represents those counsels of God, those purposes of righteousness and love, often fathomless, but never obscure, always the same, though sometimes glowing with holy anger, *like unto crystal*, resplendent and pellucid. The pavements, or, as we say, *floors*, of palaces and elegant houses of the East are constructed with expensive and splendid materials. Here the idea is that the pavements or floors are all of precious and diaphonous stones, appearing to him who should walk upon them pellucid, like the waters of the ocean. In the Koran, Belkis, the Queen of Sheba, is represented as supposing the pavement on which she walks in the audience-hall to be a *sea* (*Moses Stuart*). **Four beasts.**—Living beings. Their position in relation to the throne is not clear. They were either the supports or ornamentation of the throne. **Full of eyes.**—Teeming with. Easterns indicate greatness and variety of power by multiplying representations of the organ. (Curiously enough, the Fathers regard these beasts as representing the Four Gospels, which had no recognised existence in St. John's day). Perhaps they represent animate nature. But it is more probable that, as they take precedence even of the crowned elders in their ceaseless worship, they represent redeemed humanity. *Birks* says: "They seem to represent four distinct classes, each federally united among those blessed saints who occupy the foremost places in the kingdom of glory." For *Stuart's* view see "Suggestive Notes."

Ver. 7. "Four beings hold a primacy in the world: among created beings, man; among birds, the eagle; among cattle, the ox; among untamed animals, the lion. The characteristics of these four chiefs of creation unite to make a perfect picture of the spirit of true service, which should be brave as the lion, patient as the ox, aspiring as the eagle, intelligent as man." The number four is, in the Apocalypse, almost always associated with the *earth*.

Ver. 8. **Six wings.**—Compare Isa. vi. 1-4. **Full of eyes.**—Compare Ezek. i. 18, x. 12; Zech. iii. 9. Multiplicity of eyes may symbolise vitality and vigilance. **Within.**—This may mean, inside their wings; and these eyes were seen when the wings were spread. **Almighty.**—Heb. in Isaiah, "God of hosts."

Vers. 9, 10. **Beasts give glory.**—The idea of this and the following verse is, that when the redeemed Church realises the voice of creation in its worship, it reverently joins in the worship. "All Thy works praise Thee in all places of Thy dominion, and Thy saints shall bless Thee." See the ascriptions of praise to Jehovah in 1 Chron. xix. 10-13; Ps. xcvi. 2, 3, 7-10. **Cast their crowns.**—*Alford* compares Tacitus, *Ann.*, XV. xxix. 3, 6, where Tiridates lays down his crown before the image of Nero, as a token of homage for his kingdom. The *future* tenses, "shall worship," "shall cast," indicate what is *often and customarily* done in heaven. *Simcox* suggests that the tenses in this book may be accommodated to the rules of Hebrew rather than of Greek grammar.

"Thus concludes this magnificent exordium to the principal visions of the book. Chap. v. is intimately connected with it, but it is rather to be regarded as a special proem to chap. vi.—xi., than as a proem to the book at large. The impressive nature of the scene presented in chap. iv. cannot but strike the mind of every intelligent reader. The holy seer was duly prepared, by such an august vision, for the disclosures which follow, and the mind of the reader can hardly fail to be prepared, also, to look for them with deep interest. It cannot escape even the most unobserving, how greatly this whole scene resembles the inaugural theophanies in Isa. vi. and Ezek. i." (*Stuart*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1—11.

The Eternal Throne and its Surroundings.—From the very first, and still, there will be found a side of peril in the very intensity with which the Lord Jesus Christ is presented to us. He may take our attention off from God, and seem to stand in front of Him. Our Lord Himself recognised this possible evil, during His earthly life. He might absorb too fully the interest of His disciples, and therefore we find Him, in His conversations with them, constantly putting His Father, as it were, in front of Himself. The apostles show precisely the same anxiety. They will not let the interest of men stay with Christ. He leads men to God. By Him they believe in God. Remembering how jealous the Jews were of the primary truth of the Divine *unity*, we can easily see that it would have been a fatal objection to Christianity if it could be reasonably shown that it put Christ in the place of God. Essentially Christ is God; but revelationally, and for particular purposes of manifestation, He is apprehended as the Son of God, and as Son, He must not be confused with the Father, or, in any sense, put in His place. This important distinction explains this introductory vision of the eternal glory of God. The seer has brought the Lord Jesus Christ vividly before us as the Living, White One. He is going to deal with the present activities of that Living One in the Church, and in the world in which His Church is set. He will be filling all our thoughts with Christ. But there must be no possibility of mistake, no possibility of our even seeming to put dishonour on God, or showing Him any slight, or failing to recognise His supreme relations with the actual, present work of Christ. So the vision of this chapter is given, and God is seen receiving the absolutely sole worship of the representatives of all creation, animal and human. He is God alone. Heaven is visioned as the sublime palace of the eternal King, and a door is set open so that we may enter the audience-chamber; and we may well be awed by the magnificence, the sublimity, of the scene.

I. **The throne.**—To this much attention is given in Eastern Kingdoms. (For Solomon's throne, see 1 Kings x. 18-20). The *stability* of this throne is even more impressive than its *splendour*. However shifting and changing may be the panorama of events recorded in this book, that throne remains the same. Heaven and earth may pass away. That throne abides. It cannot be moved, because "righteousness and judgment are its habitation." Carefully observe that no attempt is ever made in Scripture to describe Him who sitteth on the eternal throne. He must ever simply be to us the "I AM." "Existence—uncaused, independent existence."

II. **The supports of the throne.**—The four living creatures, as the representatives of all creation. The honour and dignity of God is the supreme concern of every living thing. His throne is upheld by their needs, which God alone can meet; by their trustings, which are its buttresses; and by their service in their spheres, which witnesses to their Master.

III. **The front of the throne.**—Two ideas are suggested in connection with the sea of glass. 1. The shining pavement is like solidified water. 2. The brazen sea, in front of the temple, indicated the need for purity in all who came to worship. The former idea is the more probable one, and only a figure of magnificence is intended. Or the idea of waving sea, settled into glassy stillness, may suggest the sublime peace of God's eternal presence. "Where, beyond the voices, there is peace."

IV. **The courtiers.**—Four and twenty elders. Officers were always in the royal presence at Eastern Courts, and these often represented the provinces of the country, or dependent nations. The elders stand for the Church as at

present redeemed. The full chorus of *creation* rises now to God; but the full chorus of humanity does not rise yet. It is but the chorus of a *portion.*

V. The worship.—The point to notice is, that God's praise is begun by creation; taken up and ennobled by the redeemed Church, but perfected only when all are redeemed, and the completed Church can join the song of Nature, and so all the earth "praise God."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 1. *An Anticipative Triumph-Song.*—The fourth and fifth chapters are to be regarded as a song of triumph sung even before the contest begins, and conveying to us an assurance of what will be the issue. It will not be forgotten that this is elsewhere the manner of St. John. Before the great contest delineated in the fourth gospel, which begins at chap. v., we have the victory of the Redeemer over Nicodemus, the woman of Samaria, and the Galilean nobleman. When speaking, in his first epistle, of the struggles of Christians with the world, St. John uses the words, "And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (chap. v. 4). He does not speak of the weapons with which the Christian soldier prepares himself for the battle, but of the "victory" with which, as if it were his armour, he is, from the first, equipped. In other words, it is St. John's manner of thought to sing his song of triumph before the fight begins, and that is exactly what he does in the fourth and fifth chapters of the Apocalypse.—*W. Milligan, D.D.*

A Vision of the Glory of God.—The fourth chapter is a vision of the glory of God. His throne is supported by four living creatures, and twenty-four elders fall down before it. These are the representatives of Nature and of the Church. The former represent the forces of nature, which, in the ancient religions, sat upon the throne, personified in the Pagan deities, but which, in the monotheism of the Bible, play a more modest part, and are employed in bearing up the throne of God—that is to say, in establishing His kingdom. They are represented by the four living creatures which are supposed to be the *chefs d'œuvre* of the animal creation—the lion, the bull, the eagle, and man. The twenty-four elders represent the Judæo-Christian and the Gentile Church, twelve for each of these two moieties of the primitive Church, in conformity with the types of the twelve patriarchs, the twelve tribes, and the twelve apostles.—*F. Godet, D.D.*

Ver. 3. *The Rainbow Symbol.*—The discovery made of the Divine mercy in the covenant of grace refreshes the mind as the green relieves the eye from the fatigue and glare of other colours. "In the arched iris spanning the Divine throne the ancient Church beheld an emblem of the Divine severity, blended with love; in it she saw the dark showers of His judgments, gilded by the bright beams of His mercy. The heavenly Bow spake to her of the Deluge, the shipwreck of the world for sin; it spake to her also of calm and sunshine after the storm."—*Wordsworth.*

Being in the Spirit.—He was in a rapture, as before (chap. i. 10), whether in the body or out of the body we cannot tell; perhaps he himself could not; however, all bodily actions and sensations were for a time suspended, and his spirit was possessed with a spirit of prophecy, and wholly under a Divine influence. The more we abstract ourselves from all corporeal things the more fit we are for communion with God; the body is a veil, a cloud, and a clog to the mind in its transactions with God. We should, as it were, forget it when we go in before the Lord in duty, and be willing to drop it,

that we may go up to Him in heaven.—*Matthew Henry.*

Eastern Abstraction.—It is well to remember that Easterns have a power of mental abstraction—of separating themselves for a time from their bodies—which is quite inconceivable to Westerns. Illustrate by the experiences of Yogis, Brahmans, Buddhists, and even Dervishes.

Ver. 6. *The Throne and the Living Creatures.*—The whole imagery is to be conceived of thus: The throne on which the Divine Majesty is seated rests upon four living creatures, who form its animated and moving basis. Instead of being like the throne of earthly kings, *i.e.*, resting upon inanimate and lifeless substances, its support is constituted of living, moving, rational creatures, ever watchful, and ever ready to move, as Ezekiel says, like "a flash of lightning" (Ezek. i. 14). These living creatures are represented as endowed with forms which are symbolical and highly significant. They are "full of eyes"; *i.e.*, they are ever wakeful and watchful, looking every way, seeing everything, and ready to move in any direction. They are, taken as a whole in respect to their ultimate design, symbolic of the all-pervading power, providence, and government, of God, who uses them as His instruments. The first has the appearance of a lion; and the lion is the king of wild beasts, and an image borrowed from him is indicative of power, strength, sway. The second is like to an ox; and this is the most valuable of tame beasts, and the image of patient and useful labour. The third has the face of a man; and this is indicative of reason and intelligence. The fourth is like to an eagle; and this indicates velocity, and far-sighted and penetrating vision. The special meaning of these symbols is not to be applied immediately, or directly, to the attributes of God Himself, but to be regarded as primarily indicative of powers possessed by the ζῶα. Yet the ζῶα thus constituted, are themselves symbolic of the attributes of the Godhead. These living bearers of the Almighty's throne, as the author represents the matter, serve Him with great power, with patient obedience, with quickness of intelligence and reason, and with a rapidity and perspicacity which may indeed be compared to that of the eagle, but of which this king of birds is, after all, only a faint image. The same may in truth be said of all the other symbols; but then, imperfect as they are, they are the best which the natural world could afford, and are therefore chosen by the author with good reason. The ultimate meaning is: God is everywhere present, and executes His purposes by an agency powerful, wise, unremitted, and speedy whenever speed is required.—*Moses Stuart.*

Ver. 8. *The Unity of God.*—God is *one.* The unity of any being contains two ideas. 1. Oneness in *number*, whereby it is parted from all other beings without itself. 2. Oneness within itself, as opposed to every other compound.—*Bishop S. Wilberforce.*

CHAPTER V.

THE OPENER OF THE SEALED BOOK.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

HAVING duly conserved the honour of the one and only Lord God Almighty, attention can be again fixed on the ministry of the Living Christ. He has been presented under symbols bearing relation to His work *in the Church*; now He is present under symbols bearing relation to His place and rights in heaven. He is conceived of as there, "highly exalted," and "having a Name above every name"; because "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"; because He "poured out His soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors, and bare the sin of many." Christ in heaven is the accepted Sacrifice, and therefore figured as a slain Lamb. That is not His figure for earth. Here he is the present Sanctifier through the control of all the discipline of human life. Here He is presiding over the carrying through of His redemptive mission. If this distinction be fittingly apprehended, some of the apparent incongruity between the several figures of the Redeemer will be relieved. We must see Him as *God* sees Him, and then He is the slain Lamb. We must see Him as the *Church* sees Him, and then He is the Living Sanctifier, through discipline, and even through judgments.

Ver. 1. **Book.**—That it should be written on both sides implied abundance of matter. "It represents the history of the conflicts of the Church from St. John's days to the day of doom" (*Wordsworth*). Most modern writers generalise, and suppose that it is the *book of God's counsels*. But this is too vague. "*Conflictus et triumphos Ecclesiæ reser at futuros*" (*Bede*). It is, in precise relation to the subject about which St. John is writing the book which contains the mystery why the Church is left in the world, and called to bear the brunt of such calamities, temptations, and persecutions, and the present work of the Living Christ—a work entrusted to Him because He has offered a perfect and infinitely acceptable sacrifice of Himself—in the Church for the sake of the world, and in the world for the sake of the Church. The Divine purposes concerning the Church and the world are a secret, and they are symbolised by this sealed book. "The roll is not the Apocalypse so much as the book of those truths which are exemplified in the Apocalypse, as in a vast chamber of imagery" (*Carpenter*). **Seals.**—See Isa. xxix. 11; Dan. xii. 4. Note that the seals are placed in such positions that the contents can be gradually disclosed in an ordinary way. When the first seal was broken, the manuscript could be unrolled until one came to a second seal, and so on. But this idea must not be unduly pressed, so as to involve the historical and chronological order of the book of Revelation.

Ver. 2. **Strong angel.**—Suggesting that the proclamation was made throughout the whole realm of existence. His voice reached from utmost East to utmost West. **Worthy.**—Either on the ground of personal dignity or of extraordinary services. The term certainly implies *moral* fitness.

Ver. 3. **Look thereon.**—So as even to make a guess at its contents.

Ver. 5. **Lion,** etc.—As the lion is regarded as king among animals, so Christ is Lion, King of the tribe of Judah (see Gen. xlix. 9). **Root.**—Or sprout (Isa. xi. 1; Zech. vi. 12). **Prevailed.**—Conquered. Christ acquired the power to open the book by His great endurance, struggle, and victory (see Phil. ii. 6-10). The right belongs to Him alone, because He alone had suffered and conquered in doing and bearing the holy will of God. To open the book was at once the honour and privilege God gave to His accepted Son, and the work which His experience brought Him the ability to perform.

Ver. 6.—Omit words "and lo!" **Lamb,** etc.—The word used means "a little Lamb." It was in the middle front of the throne. Remember that St. John records the title given to Christ, "Lamb of God" (John i. 29, 36; Isa. liii. 7). **Had been slain.**—With marks which showed it had been slain in sacrifice, and offered to God. Compare our Lord showing the marks of His crucifixion in hands and side to doubting Thomas. The death-marks are the sign of the completion of that *life-sacrifice* which is infinitely acceptable to God, and proves Christ to be fitted to undertake the further and final stages of the redemptive work. **Seven Spirits.**—Sign of perfect competency.

Ver. 8. **Harps,** etc.—To give expression to the praises and prayers of the world-wide and age-long Church of Christ. The prayers of the saints are expressions of confidence in Christ,

as undertaking this new trust—the sanctifying of the Church He has redeemed. Its prayer is embodied in the word "come" and in the sentence "come quickly."

Ver. 10. **Shall reign on the earth.**—As sharing the victory Christ will surely win. "They reign with and in Christ, but they also reign on the earth. Christ gives them a kingship, even sovereignty, over themselves—the first, best, and most philanthropic, of all kingships. He gives them, too, a kingship on the earth among men, for they are exerting those influences, promoting those principles, and dispensing those laws of righteousness, holiness, and peace, which in reality rule all the best developments of life and history" (*Carpenter*).

Ver. 11. **Ten thousand**, etc.—Lit. "myriads of myriads" (see Dan. vii. 10).

Ver. 12. **Power**, etc.—This is the most complete of the doxologies. A sevenfold doxology. An expression of the highest adoration that language can express.

Ver. 13. **Under the earth.**—Possibly an inclusion of the holy dead. **In the sea.**—Better, "on the sea." **Unto Him that sitteth . . . unto the Lamb.**—"This linking of the Lamb with God as the Throned One is common throughout the book. Here they are linked in praise; in chap. vi. 16 they are linked in wrath; in chap. vii. 17 they are linked in ministering consolation; in chap. xix. 6, 7, they are linked in triumph. In the final vision of the book the Lord God and the Lamb are the temple (chap. xxi. 22), and the light (chap. xxi. 23), the refreshment (chap. xxii. 1), and sovereignty (chap. xxii. 3), of the celestial city."

Note on the "book."—The reason why a *book* is chosen for the symbol in this case will be very apparent to a careful reader of the Hebrew Scriptures. The *Book of Life* has a limited significance, and is employed only in respect to the state of individuals, whose weal or woe, life or death, depends on what is recorded therein. But in the present case the book before us contains a record of the secret counsels of God—*i.e.*, hitherto secret in regard to the Christian Church and its enemies. Texts which make use of the like imagery may be found in Mal. iii. 16; Ps. cxxxix. 16; and probably Deut. xxxii. 34 (*Moses Stuart*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—14.

The Acknowledgment of the Champion's Rights.—"The fifth chapter pictures the glory of the Lamb, Jesus sacrificed and risen again. In His hands is a roll made up of seven leaves, and sealed with seven seals; this book contains the Divine decrees which are about to be put into execution, with regard to the world. These two circumstances—that the Lamb is entrusted with it, and that it is He who successively breaks its seals—evidently signify that it is He who is to be the executor of the designs of God; accordingly, He is represented as possessing the *seven eyes* and the *seven horns*; that is to say, the fulness of omniscience and of omnipotence, without which He could not accomplish this Divine work" (*F. Godet, D.D.*).

I. **The champion.**—The figures employed in ver. 5 indicate His representative character. He who has undertaken to deliver man from the thraldom of sin, and has gloriously succeeded, is the very one to whom may be entrusted the further work of delivering men from the consequences of sin, and from the influence of evil surroundings. The Champion may be still entrusted with champion's work.

II. **His rights.**—The successful general considers he has rights to new commissions; rights to the full confidence of his sovereign. Rights are won by (1) proofs of ability; (2) faithfulness; (3) experience. There are rights of reward; but, to noble souls, the best reward is further and larger trust.

III. **The acknowledgment by God.**—Take the passage in Phil. ii. as fully unfolding this, and Isa. liii. as anticipating it. No one could be so profoundly interested in the redemption of humanity as He who has successfully carried through the first stage of it. Nobody could be so fully in the secret of the Divine love, or so fully in sympathy with the Divine purpose. So to Him is entrusted the sealed book.

IV. **The responsive acknowledgment of all creation.**—Indicated by the worship and praise of the representatives of all animate being. There is recognition of the dignity of the new trust; and there is recognition of the hope for humanity that lies in the further mission of the Lamb that was slain.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 1. *The Glorified Christ.*

I. **The solution of the mysteries of God.**—1. The book in the right hand. God always works by a plan. Characteristics of this plan—order, completeness, duration. 2. The book sealed. Its secrets hid. 3. Christ the revealer of the mysteries of God. This is true in relation to history—to the soul. The purpose of the Christian life is to reveal His glory and promote it.

II. **The object of worship.**—Christ worshipped by the redeemed. — *R. Vaughan Price, M.A.*

What was the Book?—Numberless interpretations have been offered. It is the Old Testament; it is the whole Bible; it is the title-deed of man's inheritance; it is the book containing the sentence of judgment on the foes of the faith; it is the Apocalypse; it is part of the Apocalypse; it is the book of God's purposes and providence. There is a truth underlying most of these interpretations, but most of them narrow the force of the vision. If we say it is the book which unfolds the principles of God's government—in a wide sense, the book of salvation (Rom. xi. 25, 26), the interpretation of life which Christ alone can bestow—we shall include, probably, the practical truths which underlie each of these interpretations; for all—Old Testament and New, man's heritage and destiny, God's purposes and providences—are dark till He who is Light unfolds those truths which shed a light on all. Such a book becomes one "which contains and interprets human history," and claims the kingdoms of the earth for God.—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

Ver. 6. *The Vision of the Slain Lamb.*—This is one of the Scripture sentences that has a holy fascination for pious, meditative souls. The figure under which it presents our Lord is exquisite with its tender suggestions. The gentleness and the sacrifice of the "Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world," come fully into view. The soul gains a holy nearness to her Lord, and a kindling of new affections, by the aid of such a painfully beautiful symbol. Of all the visions that may come to renewed souls, none can surpass this one, the "vision of the Slain Lamb." We treat this subject meditatively as a spiritual preparation. An exposition of the passage, as it stands connected with the book of Revelation, is beyond our purpose. We do not presume to treat it exhaustively; we shall feel as deeply as any one how much has been left unsaid. But sometimes we may more easily reach the very heart of truth by the way of meditation than by the way of study and research; and at sacramental seasons we want to get quite away from the bustle of Biblical controversy into the "desert place" where we can be quiet, and, in the holy stillness, find "Jesus only." A few words will suffice to give a general idea of the purpose of this book of Revelation. On the ground of His completed obedience and perfected work on earth, the New Testament teaches us that the Lord Jesus Christ is constituted Mediatorial King, and appointed to preside over the whole work of the redemption of the human race, and, indeed, the entire creation, from the consequences and dominion of sin. We are to think of our Lord as now engaged in this most blessed work, carrying out His great commission in the individual life, in the Church, in the world, and in heaven. A sublime work, whose full issues will only be revealed in the "day of Jesus Christ." But it is altogether too complicated and too vast a matter to be set down in plain human language. Human words will not reach "to the height of this great thought." And yet, in some way, the Church must receive assurance that her Lord liveth, reigneth, and is working out His beneficent purposes through

all the changes of the ages, the rising and falling of nations, the calamities of famine, pestilence, and war, and the prosperities and persecutions, declinings and reformations, of the Church. Christ uses for this purpose prophetic figures; He tells the story of the Christian ages in the highest forms of poetry and parable; paints it in visions which spiritual insight may fill up and translate, as the ages pass on. Setting however, this one thing in constant prominence, as though He would fix permanently the outlook of His Church. Christ reigns. Christ works. Everything that happens is known to Him. All things, however strange they may seem, work towards His final redemption ends. "I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of Hades and of death." In this great faith His Church must live, labour, and die. The key to the prophecy is given to us, we think, in some of the opening sentences of the first chapter. "Behold, He cometh with clouds"; not, He shall come merely in some great day of manifestation, but He "is coming," always coming; He does come to every occasion of the Church's need, to every new circumstance, both of the Church and of the world. Whatever may happen, believe that Christ *has come, and is there*, in the very midst of it. Separate your Lord from nothing that concerns you or your fellow-men. Is it persecution? Christ is come, Christ is there. Is it national calamity? Christ is come, Christ is there. Is it the falling of the Church into perilous errors? Christ is come, Christ is there. Is it abounding antichrists of scepticism, luxury or indifference? Christ is come, Christ is there. And His victorious powers will yet be displayed, when death and hell, man's last enemies, are "cast into the lake of fire." The times will often be very hard, the outlook very dark, and Christians will need much patience and faith; but they may expect and prepare for the struggle. John tells them he is their "Brother and companion in tribulation"; and in the *kingdom and patience* of Jesus Christ, the kingdom whose characteristic virtue is the patience of faith that clings hard to this great fact in the darkness and in the light—"Jesus lives," "Jesus is here." So the Christian soul ought to have its *abiding vision of the present Saviour*. And thus arises the question which our text is designed to answer—at least, in part. If we are to have a vision of Jesus, *how are we to figure Him?* It seems that we are to conceive of Him as directly related to His Churches, and to their spiritual life and progress, under the figures that are given to us in the *first* chapter of this book, as the powerfully, searchingly pure One—the fire that burns unto whiteness for the consuming of the Church's sin. But we are also to conceive of Him more generally in His mediatorial sovereignty, and this we may do with the aid of the figures of our text, standing as the central Person of all creation—a Lamb with marks of slaughter on Him, and endowed with all power and authority in His perfection of horns and perfection of eyes. "In the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth." We fix, then, attention on the Lord Jesus Christ, as Christian souls ought to apprehend Him. Observe His form, His marks, His attitude, and His place.

I. **His form.**—"A Lamb." We are very familiar with the way in which animals are regarded as types of character. The lion, for instance, represents for us majesty and force; the fox dexterity and cunning. Our Lord used the characteristic qualities of animals in commending virtues to His disciples, saying, "Be ye wise as serpents, harmless as doves." It is the business of poetry to observe the instincts of animals, and trace their analogies with the virtues and vices of men; and prophecy, such as we have in our text,

is kin to the highest poetry; it finds its only befitting expression in figurative and symbolical terms. There are certain ideas universally associated with the "Lamb." It is the common symbol of gentleness, innocence, and obedient meekness. The word used by John, however, is a peculiar one, carrying these ordinary notions and something more—something of unusual tenderness and endearment, as if this Lamb won our Love, and took at once His place in our heart. We lose something of the strength of the actual word used when we translate it, in the only words possible to us: "dear little Lamb." Perhaps our best addition to it would be the word "precious," reminding us of Peter's words: "Unto you that believe He is precious." Then we may read our verse, "In the midst of the throne stood a precious Lamb, as it had been slain." The symbol is used in connection with two others. Before John saw Christ Himself, the angel had spoken of Him in very striking terms. "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the Book and to loose the seven seals." These three figures show that He who might prevail to open the Book was no other than the *Messiah* of the older prophecies. "Lion of the tribe of Judah" is the prophecy of Jacob, uttered far back in the patriarchal times. "Root of David" is the prophecy of the middle ages of the Jewish Church. And the "Lamb slain" reminds us at once of the evangelical prophet Isaiah, and his familiar words, "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter." The chief relations in which Christ stands to us seem indicated in these triple figures: Lion, Root, and Lamb. As the Lion, He is our *Ruler* and *Head*. As the Root, He is our *Life*, whence all vitality is drawn. As the Lamb, He is our *Exemplar*, the model of the conduct that would worthily express the life lived in Christ's kingdom. Model of conduct and character that may stand the testing of uttermost sorrow and sacrifice. A Lamb led meekly even to the shearing and the slaughter. The *expected* Messiah was a Lion and a Root. These figures helped men to the knowledge of Him: but, behold, when He is fully revealed, when we see Him as He is, a new figure appears. We looked for a Lion and a Root, and we see a Lamb, with slaughter-marks and blood-stains on Him. And yet, though the change causes a passing shudder, this Lamb figure is the one for Christ that is so deeply true, so attractive, so satisfying. It embodies the very highest and most spiritual conceptions of Christ we can have. His glory is the glory of *character*. The Lamb-like purity, His fleece never once sullied with a sin-stain; the Lamb-like gentleness, neither "striving, nor crying, nor letting His voice be heard in the street": the Lamb-like obedience, knowing nothing but His Father's will, lead wheresoe'er it may. It may seem at first as though His glory was His work of redemption and sacrifice; but soon we begin to feel that not even His work must hide us from *Himself*. "Behold the Lamb of God!" This is the all-satisfying vision. It is the fitting figure for Christ's character, but it is the equally-fitting figure for Christ's *office*. As "mediatorial King" He is the Lamb. This is the symbol of His reign. He rules in righteousness. He wins by yielding. His force is gentleness. His commands are, "Hear and obey." He dignifies the "passive graces" of character. He bids us look away from the mighty things that take men's eye, to discern the secret, gentle, lamb-like forces of love, trust, patience, forbearance, submission, and hope, which are fast redeeming the world. Would you, then, see Christ, would you get a vision of Him to your soul? Behold the window opened in heaven, and a "Lamb as it had been slain." Your Lord is a Lamb, and remember He is—

> "Lord of lambs, the lowly;
> King of saints, the holy"

II. **His marks.**—"As it had been slain." He retains, in heaven, the

marks of His slaughter, and by the holy signs *we* may know Him who have these soul-visions of Him now. Slaughter is surely the right word for the cruel and dreadful death He died. To spiritual vision, indeed, it rises to the height of a sublime sacrifice; the smoke of that perfected obedience in death rose up to God to win an infinite acceptance. This Lamb was in Divine purpose "slain before the foundation of the world." "He that hath redeemed us to God by His blood." By "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." But, to human apprehension, it was still a slaughter, leaving blood-stains, and five holy wounds.

"Hath He marks to lead me to Him,
If He be my guide?
In His hands and feet are wound-prints,
And His side."

I know nothing that touches the soul like *this* sight of Christ, which we should ever keep before us. *A Lamb, as if it had been slain.* A modern poet has shown how his deepest heart was reached by it:—

"I saw, in a vision of the night,
The Lamb of God, and it was white;
White as snow, it wander'd thro'
Silent fields of hare-bell blue,
Still it wandering fed, and sweet
Flower'd the stars around its feet.

"Then suddenly I saw again,
Bleating like a thing in pain,
The Lamb of God, and all, in fear,
Gazed and cried as it came near,
For on its robe of holy white
Crimson blood-stains glimmer'd bright.
Oh, the vision of the night!
The Lamb of God! the blood-stains bright!"

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

Thomas knew his Lord by the marks, which told He was, indeed, the crucified One. And we who see Him now in the visions of the soul, we must keep in sight those marks, and so feel sure that it is, indeed, He, the "Man of love, the Crucified." For this is a part of Christ's hallowed influence upon us, as we bring Him into close and living relations. We see Him who was "slain for us." We feel Him near "who loved us, and gave Himself for us." We "consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, that we be not weary or faint in our minds." And what influence shall the abiding presence of those slaughter-marks have upon us? Surely they should keep us ever humble; what are *we*, that our redemption should have cost so much as this! They should be a voice pleading for an all-consuming, self-mastering love for Him that died. They should bring us to a hearty submission unto Him who, by agony and shame, has won the right to rule. They should call upon us continually to accept of the Christian life as a sacrifice; following Him cheerfully, and saying, "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord." Believe in the Living Christ. He is the Lamb. But never fail to observe that it is as *if He had been slain*, and "Learn of Christ to bear the cross."

III. **His attitude.**—"Stood." Not now lying down, slaughtered, and dead; but *standing*, raised again, with but the sad marks left behind of all that is now passed through and done. Once the fainting Head bowed, and they loosened the piercing nails, and bent down the rigid limbs, and lay the poor body out, and folded the spices round, and lifted it upon the bier, and carried it into the garden tomb. *Then* the Lamb of God was lying crucified, slaughtered, dead. But not thus is He to be seen by our spiritual vision *now*. "No more the bloody cross; the nails and spear no more." We have not to keep before us a dead Redeemer; the sound has long since rung through heaven, and earth, and hell, "*He liveth*, and is alive for evermore." Keep your spirits humble and solemn by the memory of His cruel death; but be sure of this: the Redeemer LIVES. Before the throne He stands in all the vigour of His eternal life. We have "a great High Priest passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God"; and "He abideth a priest continually." And yet, how Christian thought will cling about

that shameful scene of Calvary, and about that tomb where Jesus *was*, though we know He is no longer there. It is the secret source of so much of our bondage and error, that we let our minds dwell so constantly on a *dead Christ*. We preach too much a dead Christ. We paint too many artistic pictures of a dead Christ. We think too often over the dead Christ. Our vision is not cleared enough of prejudice to observe Christ's attitude before the throne. As we usually see it, the Lamb is lying down, as if it were slain. Nay, look again; the Lamb is standing up, only it has upon it the marks that tell it was once slain. How hard it is to take Paul's comparative estimate of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. "It is Christ that died, *yea, rather*, that is risen again." But another thought gathers round the attitude of Christ as Mediatorial King. He is "standing" as expressive of His activity and energy. He stands before the throne as one attentive, quick, waiting that He may obey. Like the visioned cherubim of Isaiah, who stood covering face and feet, with poised wing waiting to fly. So we are helped to feel that His rule is a living, active thing; not some sublime possibility; not some future glory; not a wondrous "may-be"; but a present fact. He stands concerned now for us; ruling now over us; active now to bless us. Applying now the virtue of His wounds; sanctifying us wholly—body, soul, and spirit; changing us now into the imago of His own Lamb-like purity. He not only liveth, but is *working*, until all enemies be put under His feet. With Stephen, we may "see Jesus standing at the right hand of God."

IV. **His place.**—"In the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders." The term "midst" should be middle, in the central place, the place that properly belongs to the representative and leader. All nature is figured as present before the rainbow-girdled throne of God. The four living creatures represent all animated nature. The Church of God is there, the older and the newer Church, for which stand four-and-twenty elders. But in the very *middle*, in the central leader's place, is "Jesus," standing for them all, Head and Representative of all. In Eastern lands the gorgeous pavilion of the great king or general is placed in the very centre of the encampment. Round it the tents of captains and soldiers are gathered, in ever-widening circles, every man's tent-door opening to the view of the king's tent. The central place is the place for the leader. And so with this feature of the vision we are helped to realise the surpassing *dignities* that belong to the slain Lamb; for, blending poetic figures, we read, "On His vesture and on His thigh is this name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords." The sadness of those wounds and blood-stains almost seems to pass; nay, the very Lamb-figure fades a little from our view, when we see the *place* He occupies, and know that to Him every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and things in earth. He is in the midst—the central place—of nature; her glory and her crown; the secret of her infinite beauty to all open, reverent souls. He is in the middle—the central place—of the old Judaic life and system. Abraham saw His day. David sang His praise. And prophets painted the coming glories of His salvation. He is in the midst—the central place—of the Christian Church, as it marches down through the ages to the great day of redemption, and of God. He leads His witnesses through martyr's fires. He keeps His followers amid fierce persecutions. He nerves His soldiers to the great warfare, and His labourers to the arduous toil. He steers the great mission ship, as it carries the gospel far and wide over the earth, while His servants sing:—

> "Fly, happy, happy sails, and bear the press,
> Fly happy with the banner of the cross;
> Knit land to land, and, flowing havenward,
> Enrich the markets of the Golden Year."

It is His rightful place. Centre everywhere and of everything. Let Him have His rightful place in your hearts,

your thoughts, your life! Complete the vision you keep before your soul of the "Lamb as it had been slain," by adding this: "He *stands* in the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders." We are to see Jesus, to be always seeing Jesus, to keep Him ever well in view. We come to His table of communion that, in the way of His own providing, and by the aid of His own symbols, we may clear and renew our visions of Him. We find no mystic presence in the bread and wine, but we find a real presence in our soul: and Him whom we see and recognise; Him before whom we freshly bow; Him whose honoured Name we anew confess; Him whose redemption-work we lovingly remember; Him whose "prepared place for us" we hope to occupy; Him whose smile we feel will make our everlasting heaven;—Him we behold as a "Lamb." Looking as if He once was slain. Standing before the throne of God. Head of nature and of man. He is the Lamb-like leader of lambs, the lowly One. Then let us become the lowly lambs He leads. He is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," then let us trust the whole burden of sin and salvation on that great sin-bearer. He is the Lamb risen to die no more, exalted to heaven's first place, crowned with the Name above every name. He is our strength, our triumph, and our hope. Let us join beasts, elders, angels, and redeemed, as they bow before Him, and sing: "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever."

The All-conquering Christ.—It is needless to say to the biblical student that this imagery has its base on Genesis xlix. 8-10. An old Hebrew Sheikh comes to die, and, dying, blesses his boys. He talks poetically. It is easy for a Semitic man to speak in poetry. One old Arab is on record as having composed a poem of one hundred and fifty-seven lines when dying. But this Sheikh is a prophet of the most High God, and his utterances are more than poetry. They are discriminating and far-seeing prophecy. They forth-tell as well as foretell the destiny of the sons, through generations to come.

I. **The victorious leadership and power of Judah.**—Of Judah, the old man says that he shall be chief amongst his brethren. "Thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise; . . . thy father's children shall bow down before thee." He is to be a victorious power. "Thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies . . . from the prey thou art gone up." His is to be a legislative and regal power. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet." He is to be the true centre of government, the rallying point of the world's hopes; "to him shall the gathering of the people be." Let us trace the history to see the facts that fulfil the prophecy. Two hundred years after the old man's dying words were spoken, we find the children of Israel going up out of Egypt, and God gives directions about the order of their encampment. "On the east side (Num. ii. 3) . . . shall they of the standard of the camp of Judah pitch." Why is Judah assigned the principal place in the front of the Tabernacle? Why is he here the chief tribe? Why should not Reuben, the first-born, be appointed here? There is no explanation to be given except that for his sin he had been displaced, "and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birth-right," and "Judah was made the chief ruler" (1 Chron. v. 1, 2). Again, in Num. vii. 12, when the offerings were to be made, Nahshon . . . of the tribe of Judah was assigned the dignity of offering first. In Numbers xxiv. 9 Balaam warns Balak that he would better beware of these people, because, according to an old tradition, they destroy their enemies with a lion's strength. "He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion, who shall stir him up?" save at his own peril. The tradition does not die, and Moses re-announces it at his dying.

He blesses the descendants of the boys whom Jacob blessed a-dying. He renews and re-formulates the prophecy (Deut. xxxiii. 7): "And this is the blessing of Judah: Hear, Lord, the voice of Judah, and bring him" (victorious from battle) "unto his people; let his hands be sufficient for him; and be thou an help to him from his enemies." The same all-conquering element, the all-prevailing, all-victorious might must still abide with Judah. When the tribes had passed into Canaan the remnants of the people were to be overcome, and Israel inquires of the Lord who shall be put in the forefront of the fray, who should lead to battle. "Who shall" (Judges i. 2, 3) "go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? And the Lord said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand." Still later the tribe of Benjamin revolt (Judges xx. 18) and the people "went to the house of God" and "asked counsel of God. Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the Lord said, Judah shall go up first." The regal pomp and power of the Messiah was symbolised by David, and the foundation of his royalty he recognised to be this old legend of his people, this prophetic decree of the father of his line. The Lord chose me, and my father's house, for He hath chosen Judah to be the ruler (1 Chr. xxviii. 4). When the north wind ripples over his harp, he sings, "Judah is my" (Israel's) "lawgiver" (Psalm lx. 7).

II. But this all-conquering and all-controlling power of Judah but symbolised **the real royalty and supreme sway of Jesus Christ**, and hence we go on to the New Testament. Matthew opens with a long chapter of hard names—the family record of the Lord Jesus, "the book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David." The old promise of Jacob in Genesis was that this regal might, this conquering splendour, should abide with Judah till the Peace-Bringer, the Shiloh, should come (Gen. xlix. 10). We have been wont to remark how this was fulfilled, and to emphasise the fact that when the Shiloh did come, this power departed from Israel. Rome's greedy eagles flew over Jerusalem and struck their bloody talons into Judæa's heart, and since then they have been peeled, scattered and scorned, hunted and hated, without a priest, without an ephod, without a sceptre, the by-word of the world. But that is not the deeper and inner meaning of the utterance. The truth is, that the regal power and splendour never did depart from Judah. Look at Matthew's record. It is a record which God kept through three thousand years, and which, after Shiloh came, of *Judah*, fell into confusion, so that no Jew on earth, it is said, can prove to-day to what tribe he belongs. The *power never did depart from Judah. It only centred in the Shiloh*, and He was of the tribe of Judah. All that had been before, as compared with the race-power of the Shiloh, was only a dim foreshadow. It was as unequal to the real might and majesty of the real Lion of the tribe of Judah as "a painted ship upon a painted ocean" is to the real ship on the real ocean. It is needless to point out the manifested regal sway of Jesus Christ. It is needless to remind ourselves, at length, that Christian kings, and Christian princes, and Christian presidents rule to-day more than half the land surface of the globe, and all the seas. The unobserved but steady transfer of the thrones and of all political power from heathen and Moslem to Christian hands is but one of the many indications that the sceptre has not yet departed from Judah, nor a "lawgiver from between his feet."

III. It would be interesting to note at length **the blending of the Lion of the tribe of Judah and Shiloh the Peace-Bringer, as the two elements are portrayed in the book of Revelation.** —The *Rest-Man* is to rule, until He put all enemies under His feet. He is to be the *Prince* of Peace, "that in

the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth even in Him" (Eph. i. 10), for to this Lion, Shiloh, "shall the gathering of the people be." In our text (chap. v. 5, 6), John was asked to behold a Lion, and he looked and beheld a Lamb. He looked for the Lion of the tribe of Judah and beheld the Shiloh. And now henceforth John flashes and flames with the record of his visions of the all-conquering, all-controlling, all-compelling power, the regal splendour, the triumphant sway, of the Shiloh—the Lamb slain. The Lamb is the centre of thrones and principalities and powers. He is the centre of the homage and honour of the whole creation. The elders with harps are before the throne (chap. v. 8), and the assembly shouts His worth, saying, "Worthy is the Lamb to receive *power* . . . and *strength*, and honour, and glory," and His enemies overthrown are fearful in His presence, crying (chap. vi. 16), "Hide us . . . from the wrath of the Lamb. . . . Who shall be able to stand" before the irresistible sweep of His "sceptre"? And (chap. vii. 9, 10) an international multitude, too vast to be estimated, victorious in His might, wave palms before the throne on which He sits, and these are they (ver. 10) which washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, and He (ver. 17) fed them and led them, and "wiped away all tears from their eyes." And yet again (chap. xi. 15), amid the thunders and lightnings great voices in heaven say, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever." And still further, when the head of all the organised evil forces is overthrown, it is said he was cast down by "the blood of the Lamb." Christ's forces are enrolled, His registry is complete, and *power* was given Him (chap. xiii. 7, 8) over all kindreds and tongues and nations, and this marshalled and enrolled multitude whose names are written in the Book of Life, of the Lamb slain, ascribe unto Him all dominion. The scroll unfolds, vision rushes after vision, and one regiment of 144,000, the "King's own," a personal escort branded with the love-brand of the Father's own name in their foreheads, in sweet and royal submission "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." John's wing does not weary; he soars on. Now it is over a sea of glass, mingled with fire, where is another group of victors who had gotten the victory over the beast, who sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. The nineteenth chapter ushers us into the banqueting room for the "marriage supper of the Lamb." And now the central courts of the universe are flooded with light, and the Lamb is the Light thereof (chap. xxi. 23), and the book closes with the outflow of peace and prosperity from the centre of the regal splendour, and a "river of water flows out from the throne of God and of the Lamb."—*J. T. Gracey, D.D.*

Ver. 12. *The Slain Lamb.*—John was the bosom friend of Christ. To his affectionate, confiding nature may be traced the intimacy formed with his Lord. Through him, the beloved disciple, we have disclosed the inner life of the Lord Jesus. In gospel and epistle John makes Christ the central figure. When isolated from men, exiled at Patmos, he was not cut off from Christ, but made to witness the sublime revelations of his enthroned Redeemer, as well as the events of coming history exhibited as an opening panorama, even down to the end of time. He sees the vials poured, the trumpets blown, and Satan bound. He beholds the bewildering glory of the eternal world and hears the song, "Worthy the Lamb." Let us consider—

I. **The Lamb slain.**

II. **The Lamb worshipped as worthy.**—There is nothing dubious or defective in this matter. The statement is clear. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God." The lamb is an emblem of purity and

innocence. Christ is holy, harmless, and undefiled. We eat the flesh of a lamb and wear its fleece. Christ's flesh is meat indeed, and His blood our drink, spiritually. So, too, we are to put on the Lord Jesus. The sacrifice of Jesus delivers us from wrath, for His death cancels the debt due to justice. The demands of the law are met in our surety, and we are delivered from wrath. How was He slain? 1. He was slain in the counsel of God. His purpose who can annul? It was "before the foundation of the world." He saw man ruined through their federal head. He determined to save. That was a marvellous consultation had between the three Persons of the blessed Trinity. God gave up His Son, by eternal, inevitable, and necessary generation. Amazing act of generosity! Where can its equal be found? He doomed His Son to ignominious death. He furbished the sword of justice. 2. He was slain in promise and in type. The seed of the woman is to bruise the serpent's head. This is the germ of all succeeding promises, all of which are exceedingly precious. The serpent bruises His heel; that is, the humanity of Christ. In David's psalms, in Zechariah, Isaiah, and Daniel, we learn more of Him who was to be slain for our offences and cut off "not for Himself." He is the Paschal Lamb. The true day of Atonement was hastening, when the promise and type were to be fulfilled on Calvary. 3. He was actually slain. Infidelity has denied this, but the fact stands. He climbed the fatal hill, being straitened until the sacrifice was accomplished. The cross was erected. The nails, forged in hell, were driven as the murderous hammer fell. Blood streams from His hands and feet. The cross becomes as a rock against which the waves of the curse dash in vain—the lightning-rod that turns away the wrath of God from us, which otherwise would have slain us. The Lord of glory dies. The graves open. There is a preternatural chill in the air. Legions of hell rejoice as He cries, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Thus was the Lamb slain.

III. **The Lamb who was slain is worthy of praise.**—1. Because of His essential dignity. This meek and lowly Jesus was also kingly. This root out of a dry ground was also the fairest among the children of men. He who to some had no form or comeliness was really "altogether lovely." By Him all things were made, and by Him all things consist, stand together. The universe reflects the glory of Christ. Great is the dignity and mystery. He, too, is Prophet, Priest, and King. His name shall endure for ever. When Cæsars are forgotten and Alexanders pass into obscurity, the Lamb that was slain shall still reign in undying renown. The orchestra of heaven, and the shouts of the redeemed, proclaim Him King of kings and Lord of lords. 2. His interposition on our behalf makes Him worthy of praise. When restitution was demanded, Christ met the claim. How could God be just and yet justify the sinner? When the Father asked, "Who shall go for us?" the Son replied, "Here am I, send Me; I delight to do Thy will." We admire the self-forgetfulness of men in philanthropic endeavour, but it is not worthy to be compared with the self-abnegation of the Redeemer of the world. 3. His exaltation makes Jesus worthy of praise. He hath been "highly exalted" to the right hand of the Father. In the name of Jesus every knee shall bow to pray, for Him hath God made Lord of all. He drank of the brook by the way, and therefore hath He lifted up the head. To Him are given dominion, and glory, and power, and blessing. All in heaven worship the Lamb who was slain. Shall not we join them in this adoration? Yes, let us kiss the Son, lest He be angry. 4. Christ is represented as receiving the homage of the whole creation. All in heaven, and in earth, and under the earth, join in this recognition of the Lamb that was slain. This is with the approval of God the Father. Then we should not

delay to bring our worship and service to Christ. In conclusion, I remark: 1. Here is revealed the love of God the Father. He so loved the world, He gave Christ to die. The apostle also says, "He gave Himself for us." Here is love which is measureless. Paul prays that we may be able to comprehend its length, breadth, height, and depth, yet adds that it passes knowledge. 2. We infer the value of the atonement. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." We cannot compute the worth of this infinite sacrifice. We walk on the brink of an ocean of fathomless depth, as Newton said he stood by the sea-shore picking up, as it were, mere pebbles of truth, knowing little of treasures hid. 3. This memorial supper is an appropriate recognition of the work of Christ's atoning grace. Men keep the deeds of heroes in mind by memorial observances; they build shrines and rear pillars. But here is a sublimer event, that calls us to more solemn and reverent recognition of the Lamb that was slain for our salvation. 4. I offer you this Saviour as your only hope. Do not pass by with indifference, but seek His favour, which is life, and His lovingkindness, which is better than life. In the love and favour of Jesus Christ, the Lamb that was slain, you are safe for time and safe for eternity. —*D. Steele, D.D.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1. *Written Scrolls.*—Sometimes the scrolls were written on both sides, and the manner in which this was done is so well explained by a modern traveller, who saw two ancient rolls of this description in Syria, that we shall give the account in his own words: "In the monastery," says *Mr. Hartly*, "I observed two very beautiful rolls, containing the liturgy of St. Chrysostom and that attributed by the Greeks to St. James. You begin to read by unrolling, and you continue to read and unroll, till at last you arrive at the stick to which the roll is fastened; then you turn the parchment round, and continue to read on the other side, rolling it gradually up till you complete the liturgy." It was thus written within and without, and it may serve to convey an intelligible and correct idea of the books described both by Ezekiel and John.—*Paxton.*

Ver. 6. *The Plea in Christ's Intercession.* —("As it had been slain.") "A rare illustration of the efficacious intercession of Christ in heaven we have in that famous story of Amintas, who appeared as an advocate for his brother Æschylus, who was strongly accused, and very likely to be condemned to die. Now, Amintas, having performed great services, and merited highly of the commonwealth, in whose service one of his hands was cut off in the field, he came into the court, in his brother's behalf, and said nothing, but only lifted up his arm and showed them an arm without a hand, which so moved them that without speaking a word, they freed his brother immediately. And thus, if you look into chap. v. 6, you shall see in what posture Christ is represented visionally there as standing between God and us: 'And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain;' that is, bearing in His glorified body the marks of death and sacrifice. Those wounds He received for our sins on earth are, as it were, still fresh bleeding in heaven; a moving and prevailing argument it is with the Father to give us the mercies He pleads for."—*Flavel.*

The "Agnus Dei."—In early Christian art, symbolical representations of our Saviour as a lamb are found, and it was at the Trullan Council (692 A.D.) that it was decreed that the Lord should no longer be pictured in churches under the form of a lamb, but in human form. It was an ancient custom to distribute to the worshippers, on the first Sunday after Easter, particles of wax taken from the paschal tapers, each particle being stamped with the figure of a lamb. These were burned in houses, fields, or vineyards, to secure them against evil influence or thunderstrokes. A waxen *Agnus Dei* is said to have been among the presents made by Gregory the Great to Theolinda, Queen of the Lombards; but proof of this is wanting. One was found in 1725 A.D., in the Church of San Clemente, at Rome, in a tomb supposed to be that of Flavius Clemens, a martyr. A legend preserved by Robert of Mount St. Michael tells how, in the year 1183, the Holy Virgin appeared to a woodman at work in a forest, and gave him a medal bearing her own image, and that of her Son, with the inscription, "*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, Dona nobis pacem.*" This she bade him bear to the bishop, and tell him that all who wished the peace of the church

should make such medals as these, and wear them in token of peace.—*Biblical Dictionary of Antiquities.*

Ver. 8. *The Praises and Prayers of the Church.*—The vials (which seem to be censers, as they hold the incense) and the harps, it is perhaps more natural to suppose, were in the hands of the four and twenty elders, and not of the living creatures. Here, then, we have the praises (represented by the harps), and the prayers (represented by the censers), of the world-wide and age-long Church of Christ. The true odours are the heart-prayers of God's children. *Archbishop Leighton* says, alluding to the composition of the Temple incense: "Of these three sweet ingredient perfumes—namely, petition, confession, thanksgiving—is the essence of prayer, and by the Divine fire of love it ascends unto God, the heart and all with it; and when the hearts of the saints unite in joint prayer, the pillar of sweet smoke goes up the greater and the fuller."—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

CHAPTER VI.

CALAMITIES ON THE OPENING OF SIX SEALS.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

THE first catastrophe, or overthrow of the Jewish persecuting power, is the subject of chaps. vi.—xi. Some take the subject in a more general way, as being the relation of Christianity to great universal evils.

Ver. 1 **One.**—*ἑνός*, the first of the living ones. **Come and see.**—Properly only the word "*Come.*" This cry is not to the seer, but to the riders, who immediately begin to appear. Some take the invitation as "addressed to the Lord Jesus. His creatures pray Him to come—and behold, instead of His coming immediately, there come these terrible precursors of His, so increasingly unlike Him."

Ver. 2. **White horse.**—The rider is armed with a bow, and adorned with a victor's crown. "This is an emblem of the *gospel*, which, through the instrumentality of preaching, is about to extend itself victoriously through the earth." For visions of horses see Zech. i. 8-11; vi. 1-8. There is symbolic significance in their colours. Here the colours of the four horses symbolise triumph, slaughter, mourning, and death. The meaning of the first is disputed. *Simcox* suggests that it symbolises the "spirit of conquest"; such as animates men like Alexander or Napoleon. *Carpenter* improves on this by suggesting the spirit of *Christian* victory. The horses used in Roman triumphs were white.

Ver. 4. **Horse that was red.**—The angel of *war*. "The seal puts in pictorial form the warning of Christ, that wars and rumours of wars would be heard of. Red is the symbol of blood to be shed."

Ver. 5. **A black horse.**—"Whose rider holds a pair of balances in his hand, with which he measures out to men their daily portion of wheat and of barley: this is the angel of famine." Black is the colour indicative of distress, misfortune, or mourning. It is a picture of "bad times."

Ver. 8. **Pale horse.**—*I.e.* livid; lit. green, cadaverous. The emblem of contagious sickness or pestilence. **Hell.**—Is Hades, the shelter-place of the spirits of the dead. The "under-world." The grave, conceived of as ready to devour those slain by the pestilence. **Fourth part.**—A mission in strict limitations. But pestilence is not here regarded as a single force; it is associated with war, famine, accidents, and inroads of wild beasts (Ezek. xiv. 21). Possibly it represents the special calamities of what are called the Middle Ages.

Ver. 9. **Fifth seal.**—No horse is associated with this. It is the announcement of the *last persecutions.* A scene in the invisible world; the cry of the martyrs whose blood has been shed unjustly, and who demand the appearing of the Judge of the world. **Altar.**—Here first mentioned. In Old-Testament sacrifices, the blood of the victims was poured out at the foot of the altar. "This seal indicates that the mission of the Christian Church can only be carried out in suffering." **Souls.**—This word usually means the mere principle of natural life, as distinguished from "spirit," the immortal part of man. In Scripture it is often the simple equivalent of *life.*

Ver. 10. **O Lord.**—ὁ δεσπότης, our Sovereign, distinguished from κύριος. "It is a poetical description. The righteous blood shed does fall upon the world in retribution; the laws of God avenge themselves, though the victims do not live to behold the rewards of the ungodly."

Ver. 11. **White robes.**—As sign of the Divine acceptance and favour. **Rest.**—There was need for checking the impatience of the age for our Lord's immediate return.

Ver. 12. **Earthquake.**—Matt. xxiv. 7. Actual natural calamity. The fear produced by earthquake, and its associated effects in nature, is poetically given in this and following verses. "All phenomena of this kind were anciently regarded with great terror, as being the evidences that God was angry, and was about to punish." **Blood.**—Compare Joel ii. 31.

Ver. 13. **Stars.**—Matt. xiv. 29. **Fig tree.**—Isa. xxxiv. 4; but see Matt. xxiv. 32. **Untimely figs.**—Those which form too late to ripen, and fall off when spring comes.

Ver. 14. **Departed.**—Better, "parted." **Moved.**—By force of the earthquake.

Ver. 15. **Dens . . . rocks.**—Shelter-places sought in the senseless fright produced by the earthquake.

Vers. 16, 17. **Day of His wrath.**—This was the *fear*, not the *fact*. This entire picture must be explained by the wild, unreasoning alarm occasioned by an unusually awful earthquake. In every great convulsion of nature, and in every great social convulsion, people rush at once to the idea that the day of judgment has come. But Christians ought not to yield to any such fears.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—17.

The Chief Outward Woes of Human Society which will Bear on the Church.—Just as the individual Christian is left in the world to be disciplined by an ever-varying human experience, so is the Church left in the world, and made subject to the influence of calamities in the sphere of nature, persecutions at the hand of man, and disappointments and failures in the orderings of Divine Providence. The Apocalypse first presents the strain in which the Church is placed by its outward relations, and then the more severe and perilous strain through evils, and evil influences, within itself. (Compare Acts xx. 29, 30.) The more serious strain involved in the presence of an apostate section in the Church, or from a wildly time-serving spirit getting into the Church, is dealt with in the later chapters, under the heading of the seventh seal. The evils are variously represented as the work of Antichrist, the Beast, and the False Prophet; and the Apostate Church within the Church is the Babylon that must come into the overwhelming judgments of God. The first four of the seals are evidently alike in this, that they deal with the things that try the characters of men, and press heavily on human society. The first seal is the most difficult one to understand. *Godet* thinks the conqueror on the white horse represents the *gospel*, but that would not harmonise with the other seals. A peaceful conqueror, who covers distances with his *bow*, is clearly indicated; and the only such conqueror that can be conceived is commerce and colonisation. From one point of view this is a woe, for commerce has its side of financial calamities, and colonisation breaks up family and Church life. The second seal reveals the influence of war; the third the influence of famine, or scarcity; and the fourth the influence of contagious disease or pestilence. It will at once be felt that, in the history of the Christian Church, all these things have exerted disciplinary influence, but that no sort of chronological order need be assigned to them. The fifth seal introduces the actual persecutions to which the Church is subject from outside enemies, which often involve martyrdom. The point of the paragraph, vers. 9-11, is not the vision of those who have been martyred, but the assurance that, in the time to come, their fellow-servants *would be killed*, even as they were. The sixth seal deals with the more terrible convulsions of nature—earthquakes, volcanoes, tempests, etc., and the more terrible portents—eclipses, etc.—which, in those days, filled men with overwhelming fears, and could not fail to influence even the Church of Christ. What St. John presents by his vision of the seals to the oppressed and persecuted Churches of Asia in his day is,

that the various outward forms of strain will still be permitted to affect them. Sometimes the strain on faith and steadfastness will take one form and sometimes another. It may be financial distress, or war, or scarcity, or pestilence, or martyrdom, or disasters of nature. The Church life had to be maintained under every form of stress and temptation. And it is precisely to use these various seemingly evil influences for His sanctifying purposes that the Living Lord Jesus is now actually present in His Church, "walking among the seven golden candlesticks."

M. Renan gives a vivid picture of the extraordinary natural calamities occurring at the time when the Apocalypse was written. "Never had the world been seized with such a trembling fit; the earth itself was a prey to the most terrible convulsions: the whole world was smitten with giddiness. The planet seemed shaken to its foundations, and to have no life left in it. The conflict of the legions (amongst themselves) was terrible; . . . famine was added to massacre; . . . misery was extreme. In the year 65 A.D., a horrible plague visited Rome. During the autumn there were counted thirty thousand deaths. The Campagna was desolated by typhoons and cyclones; . . . the order of nature seemed to be overturned; frightful tempests spread terror in all directions. But that which produced the greatest impression was the earthquakes. The globe was undergoing a convulsion analogous to that of the moral world; it was as if the earth and mankind were taken with fever simultaneously. Vesuvius was preparing for the terrible eruption of the year 79. Asia Minor was in a chronic earthquake. Its cities had to be continually re-built. The valley of the Lycus especially, with its Christian towns of Laodicea and Colossæ, was laid waste in the year 60.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 1. *The Call to the Riders.*—This invitation indicates that the events revealed are great and wonderful; it consoles the Church with the assurance that, however she may suffer, the voice of the gospels will survive—that all her sufferings will be for her own good and for Christ's glory.—*Wordsworth.*

The Living Creatures.—The living creatures represent animate nature—that nature and creation of God which groans and travails in pain, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. These summon the emblems of war and pestilence to come on the scene, for these things must needs be, and through these lies the way for the final coming of God's Christ, for whom Creation longs. They bid the pains and troubles come, because they recognise them as the precursors of Creation's true King. Thus their voice has in it an undertone which sighs for the advent of the Prince of Peace, who is *to come.*—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

Ver. 8. *The Personification of Death.*—"The personification of death, in the act of executing the Divine commands, is exhibited with great difference, both as to features and character, amongst different nations. Perhaps the most mean delineation is the common monkish one of a skeleton, with dart and hour-glass; while one of the most terrible is that of the Scandinavian poets, who represent him as mounted on horseback, riding with inconceivable rapidity in pursuit of his prey, meagre and wan, and the horse possessing the same character as his rider. Yet the passage cited from the Apocalypse is, in sublimity and terror, superior to the most energetic specimens of Runic poetry. The word translated pale (*chloros*) is peculiarly expressive in the original; it might be more adequately rendered "ghastly," meaning that wan

and exanimate hue exhibited in certain diseases."—*Mason Good.*

Times of Public Sickness.—Some interpret this of the persecution under Decius and his successors, of the epidemic diseases, consequent upon famine, which prevailed so widely from A.D. 250 to 265, that half the population is said to have been destroyed by war, pestilence, and famine. After the death of Gallienus, the multiplication of wild beasts in various parts of the empire was ascribed to the guilt of the Christians.

Ver. 9. *Martyr Ages.*—The burden of this passage is, that there should be a fierce and sanguinary persecution of the Christians during this seal; that that persecution should be terminated by a temporary and judicial deliverance of the oppressed ones, in which should supervene another terrible persecution. The signal triumph of the cause of the martyrs over that of their cruel oppressors satisfies all the requirements of the passage.—*Bishop Waldegrave.*

Ver. 12. *Natural Signs of Spiritual Events.*—We are not to expect a literal fulfilment of the prophecies in this seal, which describe a great elemental convulsion. We are not to look for any terrific changes in the heavenly bodies before Christ's Second Coming. These prophecies are spiritual, and to be understood spiritually.—*Wordsworth.*

Vers. 16, 17. *The Wrath of the Lamb.*—The lamb is the most simply innocent of all animals. Historically, also, it had become a name for sacrifice. Under this twofold reason Christ is set forth as the Lamb. The lamb is but the complemental gentleness of God's judicial vigour. A most paradoxical, jarring combination of words predicates wrath of the very lambhood of Christ. To some, even to speak of the wrath of God is an offence, though Scripture speaks of His wrath without compunction. But the term "wrath of the Lamb" not only violates a first principle of rhetoric, forbidding the conjunction of symbols that have no agreement of kind or quality, but also shocks our cherished conceptions of Christ as the suffering Victim or the all-merciful and beneficent Friend, in either way the Saviour of sinners. Who will ever speak of a lamb's wrath? Scripture does. What shall we make of such a fact? Simply this, that while our particular age is at the point of apogee from all the more robust and vigorous conceptions of God in His relation to evil—while it makes nothing of God as a person or governing will, less, if possible, of sin as a wrong-doing by subject wills—we are still to believe in Christianity, and not in the new religion of nature. We must have the right to believe in the real Christ, and not that theologic Christ which has so long been praised, as it were, into weakness, by the showing that separates Him from all God's decisive energies and fires of combustion, and puts Him over against them, to be only a pacifier of them by His suffering goodness. Our Christ must be the real King—Messiah—and no mere victim; He must govern, have His indignations, take the regal way in His salvation. His goodness must have fire and fibre enough to make it Divine. We take the principle without scruple, that if we can settle what is to be understood by the wrath of God we shall not only find the wrath in God, but as much more intensely revealed in the incarnate life and ministry of Christ as the love is, or the patience, or any other character of God. Since He is the Lamb, in other words, the most emphatic and appalling of all epithets will have its place—viz., the wrath of the Lamb. We want a better English word to express the Scriptural word ὀργή. We have wrath, anger, indignation, fury, vengeance, judgment, justice, and the like, but they are all more or less defective. Indignation is the most unexceptionable, but it is too prosy

and weak to carry such a meaning with due effect. Wrath must be kept as a moral, not merely animal, passion, or it will connect associations of unregulated temper that are wholly unsuitable. We understand by wrath, as applied to God and to Christ, a certain principled heat of resentment towards evil-doing and evil-doers, such as arms the good to inflictions of pain or just retribution upon them. It is not the heat of revenge. It is that holy heat which kindles about order and law, and truth and light, going in, as it were, spontaneously to redress their wrongs, and chastise the injuries they have suffered. It is that, in every moral nature, which prepares it to be an essentially beneficent avenger. Is it, then, a fact that Christ, as the incarnate Word of God, embodies and reveals the wrath-principle of God, even as He does the patience, or love-principle, and as much more intensely? On this point we have many distinct evidences. 1. Christ cannot be a true manifestation of God when He comes in half the character of God, to act upon, or qualify, or pacify, the other half. If only God's affectional nature is represented in Him, then He is but a half manifestation. If the purposes of God, the justice of God, the indignations of God, are not in Him—if anything is shut away, or let down, or covered over—then He is not in God's proportions, and does not incarnate His character. 2. Christ can be the manifested wrath of God without being any the less tender in His feeling, or gentle in His patience. In the history of Jesus we see occasions in which He actually displays the judicial and the tender, most affectingly, together and in the very same scene, as in His denouncing and weeping over Jerusalem. Indeed, the tenderest, purest souls will, for just that reason, be hottest in the wrath-principle where any bitter wrong, or shameful crime, is committed. They take fire, and burn, because they feel. 3. God, without the wrath-principle, never was, and Christ never can be, a complete character. This element belongs inherently to every moral nature. God is no God without it; man is no man without it. It is this principled wrath, in one view, that gives staminal force and majesty to character. 4. It is a conceded principle of justice that wrong-doers are to suffer just according to what they deserve. In Christianity God is not less just or more merciful, but He is more fitly and proportionately expressed. 5. One of the things most needed in the recovery of men to God is this very thing—a more decisive manifestation of the wrath-principle and justice of God. Intimidation is the first means of grace. 6. We can see for ourselves that the more impressive revelation of wrath, which appears to be wanted, is actually made in the person of Christ, as in His driving out the money-changers, and denouncing the hypocritical Pharisees. 7. Christ is appointed and publicly undertakes to maintain the wrath-principle officially, as the Judge of the world, even as He maintains the love-principle officially, as the Saviour of the world. He even declares that authority is given Him to execute judgment, *because* He is the Son of man. But the wrath-principle in Christ is only that judicial impulse that backs Him in the infliction of justice whenever justice requires to be inflicted. And it does not require to be inflicted always; it never ought to be when there is anything better that is possible. Put it down, then, first of all, at the close of this great subject, that the New Testament gives us no new God, or better God, or less just God, than we had before. He is the I AM of all ages, the I AM that was, and is, and is to come; the same that was declared from the beginning—"The Lord God, gracious and merciful, forgiving iniquity, transgressions, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty."—*H. Bushnell, D.D.*

Ver. 17. *Survivors of the Calamities.*—The sixth seal does not give us a completed picture. We see the great

and awe-inspiring movements which are heralds of the day of wrath. The whole world is stirred and startled at the tread of the approaching Christ, and then the vision melts away; we see no more, but we have seen enough to be sure that the close of the age is at hand. Yet we are anxious to know something of those who have been faithful, pure, and chivalrous witnesses for truth and right, for Christ and God. In that day, that awful day, the whole population of the world seems to be smitten with dismay; the trees, shaken with that terrible tempest, seem to be shedding all their fruit; the trembling of all created things seems to be about to shake down every building. Are all to go? Are none strong enough to survive? We heard that there were seven seals attached to the mystic book which the Lion of the tribe of Judah was opening; but this sixth seal presents us with the picture of universal desolation. What is there left for the seventh seal to tell us? The answer to these questions is given in the seventh chapter, which introduces scenes that may either be taken as dissolving views, presented in the course of the sixth seal, or as complementary visions. And those scenes show us in pictorial form that the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation; that in the midst of the time of the shaking of all things, when all might, majesty, strength, and genius of men is laid low, and every mere earth-born kingdom is overthrown, there is a kingdom which cannot be shaken.—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

The Awful Character of Earthquakes.—One of the most terrible earthquakes on record happened at Lisbon, November 1st, 1755. The morning was fine, and there was no apparent indication of the coming destruction. About nine o'clock a low subterraneous rumbling was heard, which gradually increased, and culminated at last in a violent shock of earthquake, which levelled to the ground many of the principal buildings of the place. Three other shocks followed in rapid succession and continued the work of destruction. Scarcely had the ill-fated inhabitants begun to realise the enormity of the disaster which had come upon them when they were surprised by another visitation of a different, but not less destructive, character. The sea began to rush with great violence into the Tagus, which rose at once as much as forty feet above high-water mark. The water swept over a great part of the city, and many of the inhabitants fled from its approach to take refuge on a strong marble quay recently erected. They had collected there to the number of three thousand when the quay was suddenly hurled bottom upwards and every soul on it perished. A fire broke out in the city. And by the combined effect of these disasters sixty thousand persons are supposed to have perished.

CHAPTER VII.

SEALING OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

THIS chapter is in the nature of an *episode*. Before the enemies of the gospel are finally destroyed, St. John sees the admission of believers to their blessedness in heaven. The vision has certainly the appearance of being supplementary to the preceding, and seems to refer to the visitation described under various seals, especially the third and sixth, and to represent their *universality* ("four corners of the earth," "four winds of the earth"); their character, as *providential*, ordered and directed by God through His angels; their limitation, or suspension, or restriction, as the interests of God's Church required (*W. and W.*). *Godet* treats the two visions of this chapter as anticipative. "The foresight of her own triumph is to inspire the Church with courage to face the formidable crises which still stand between her and the object of her hope." He thinks the first vision concerns Jews (Israel); the second the Gentile Church. It is, however, better to take the early standpoint, and see the Christian Church as composed of two distinct, though closely related elements, the Judaic and the Gentile. The revelation is not addressed to Jews, nor does it concern them, save as they stand in some relation, hostile or helpful, to the Christian Church.

Ver. 1. **After these things.**—Not to be unduly pressed. The law of succession in time controls all forms of human thinking, even visions. **Holding**, etc.—By this figure the Divine care of the elect ones is intimated. Their safety is secured before the calamities indicated in the previous chapter are let loose. Winds, being a great cause of calamities, are taken as symbols of calamity.

Ver. 2. **Ascending.**—In the book of *Enoch*, which seems to have suggested some of the figures of *this* book, the east is the paradise of God, the place where the Lord of Glory dwells. There is the possible idea also that, as the angel came with the dawn, a long day's work is intimated. **Seal of the Living God.**—Eastern kings signed documents, etc., by impressing the seal of the signet ring which they jealously kept on their finger. To entrust this seal to a person was to empower him to act on the king's authority.

Ver. 3. **Sealed the servants of God.**—This act is illustrated in the salvation of Israel from the destroying angel, through the mark of the blood upon the door. The sealing does not preserve the Church from being *affected* by outward calamities, only from being *overwhelmed* by them.

Ver. 4. **Hundred, forty and four thousand.**—Clearly a symbolical number. A goodly number, from all the tribes, had become members of the Christian Church. Scripture gives no support to the notion of "Lost Tribes."

Ver. 9. **Could number.**—The relativity of Gentile to Jewish members of the Christian Church is strikingly suggested by this fixed number for the Jewish, and limitless numbers for the Gentile, portions. **White robes.**—The sign of triumph in the conflict with evil. **Palms.**—The recognised symbol of victory.

Ver. 10. **Salvation.**—To be conceived as both a negative thing—deliverance from evil; and also a positive thing—attainment of holiness. **To our God.**—It is fitting that we go past all agencies to the final cause.

Ver. 13. **What are these?**—A question not asked in order to gain information, but in order to open the way for giving information.

Ver. 14. **Tribulation.**—A special time of trouble is referred to; probably that which was endured by the Church under the Pagan emperors. **Washed . . . in the blood.**—This very strange figure is perhaps not yet properly apprehended. The blood of Christ is used as a figure for His strenuous efforts, even unto death, in effecting His purpose of redemption. The champion from Edom with blood-dyed garments (Isa. lxiii. 1); the sweat-like blood-drops in Gethsemane; and the appeal in Hebrews, "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin," should guide us to the right thought. The idea may be this: Christ is highly exalted because, in the resistance of sin, He "poured out His soul unto death"; and these have the white robes because they, too, resisted sin, and bore their earth-burdens, and won the triumph of obedient submission, as He did, and in His strength. The figure of actually washing clothes or persons in *blood* is a very strained one, unless its symbolical character is clearly recognised.

Ver. 15. **Dwell among them.**—R.V. "Shall spread His tabernacle over them." *Dr. Tregelles* compares this passage with Exod. xl. 35, and suggests, as a true rendering, "He . . . shall be a covert over them." In *Alford's* revision we read, "shall spread His habitation

over them." The allusion, then, is to the manner in which the Israelites were, all through their wilderness journey, overshadowed by the cloud which represented God's presence, so that He was not only with them, but they did, as it were, live in the Divine tabernacle, as they moved hither and thither. Compare John i. 14; Rev. xxi. 3.

Ver. 17. **Feed them.**—As a shepherd. It should be clearly apprehended that the vision blends what waking apprehension cannot. St. John saw a *person* as if He were a lamb. We should have to speak of Christ in the glory not as a *lamb*, but as "the lamb-like One."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—17.

The Vision of the Redeemed.—

We see—

I. **The great number of the redeemed** (ver. 9). All who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and who have died in the faith; all who shall believe on Him in the future ages; infants, dying in infancy; the great multitude who have come out of great tribulation. Many are the saved.

II. **The eternal glory of the redeemed.**—1. *The glory of their appearance.* (1) "Clothed with white robes." They shine in the beauty of holiness. (2) "With palms in their hands." They are conquerors through Him that loved them. 2. *The glory of their service.* (1) Their service of song; their song of *salvation* (ver. 10); their song of eternal praise to God (ver. 12). (2) Their holy ministry (ver. 15). 3. *The glory of their eternal home.* (1) Their communion with God (ver. 15). "He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them." (2) The heavenly provision (*a*) for their immortal nature: the Lamb "shall feed them"; He is their eternal Shepherd; (*b*) for their constant refreshment: the Lamb "shall lead them unto living fountains of waters"; (*c*) For their everlasting comfort, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

III. **Our lessons from the redeemed.**—1. Once they were sufferers such as we, or more than any of us. They came "out of great tribulation." 2. Once they were sinners such as we. They had need of cleansing. They "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The same fountain is open for us. Through the merits of the same Saviour we may enter into the same heaven, and enjoy the same blessedness and glory.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 4. *Who are the "hundred and forty-four thousand?"*—Very probably the believing Jews of this period—those of the house of Israel who, in an age of national apostasy and national punishment, acknowledged Jesus as their Messiah and Lord; who accepted the new covenant and passed under its seal, both outward and inward. They are the class who are emphatically termed by St. Paul "the election," "the remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. xi. 5, 7); the predicted remnant which should be saved (Rom. ix. 27; Isa. x. 20-22, lxv. 8, 9). This interpretation is sustained by the particularity with which the tribes are named, as if to fix attention upon the fact of a special reference to the actual descendants of the patriarchs. Otherwise there must be some spiritual significance in each particular tribe, which is hardly conceivable. The exact number denotes election (Jer. iii. 14).—*W. and W.*

God's Elect.—This vision of a certain number of Israelites, and the next of an innumerable multitude of all nations, are certainly correlative to each other; and the most obvious way of understanding them is, that among God's elect there will be many faithful Israelites, and yet few comparatively to the number of faithful Gentiles.—*W. H. Simcox, M.A.*

Ver. 9. *Universal Praise for Redemption.*—Then the countless host of the redeemed, with palm branches of

victory in their hands, the emblems of the Church's triumph, unite in praising God, with all the angels, and elders, and living creatures. One universal symphony fills the heavenly world. Among this countless host stand conspicuous, in robes of white, the martyrs who have sealed their testimony by their own blood. The glory to which they are destined is brought distinctly into view in order that persecuted and suffering Christians, then "enduring the cross," might, "on account of the joy set before them, despise the shame," and attain at last to the same blessedness.—*Moses Stuart.*

Vers. 9, 10. *All Saints' Day.*—One day is given to the commemoration of the great general idea of sainthood. It seems to gather in all the multitude of the holy in every age, and bids us think of their characters, and follow in their steps. What is there in the world for each one of us that would not be here if others had not lived before us—if we were the first generation that ever peopled this populous earth of ours? What are the legacies that the past sends down to us? 1. There are certain circumstances, things which men have gradually, in the course of ages, invented and worked out, and they are permanent, and have come down to us in their accumulation. Besides these, there are certain truths; all the knowledge that man has ever won, of physics, of metaphysics, of morals, of religion, of beauty—all this we have not to win over again for ourselves. Besides these, there is another gift—of certain inspirations which we find waiting for us in the world. Men have left behind them their examples, their enthusiasms, and their standards. The impulse and contagion of their work is waiting everywhere to breathe itself into ours. The power of this inspiration comes in various ways. In some degree it is the mere force of hereditation. Then there is the distinct power of example. Moreover, they have set up certain ideals of character, not reducible to precise rules of action, with which we enter into sympathy, and to whose likeness our lives almost unconsciously attempt to shape themselves. This power of influence may belong to all the past in general. From all the multitude of failures and successes rises up the picture of a true successful manhood—the perfect man. That is our leader. Or we see that power incorporate itself in some great man. Who can explain the subtle fascination that reaches everywhere and lays hold of all kinds of men, and turns their lives out of their course to follow his course; to be with him in some sympathy of purpose, and, if possible, to be like him in some similarity of nature? We may analyse the power of leadership that great men have. It may rest in either of three things: (1) It may be in mere strength of personality; (2) it may be in some truths that he teaches; (3) or it may be in a certain thing which we call holiness, which we cannot define otherwise than that it is a larger and more manifest presence of God in the life of one man than other men have—more sympathetic nearness to Divinity—which makes men feel that he, more than they, embodies the Divine Spirit and utters the Divine will; that He shows God to them. This is the leadership of the saint. These are the leaders, the inspirers, of men—the hero, the teacher, the saint. We have reached, then, this distinctive definition of the saint. He is the man whose power comes of his holiness, his godlikeness. It is a special kind of power, and it is the strongest kind of power where it can be brought to bear at all. In the hero man feels that there is something of God's power, but by no means, of necessity, any of God Himself. In the teacher, there is God's truth, because all truth is God's, but the teacher is only the glass through which it shines. But in the saint there is something of God Himself, a real, abiding presence of Divinity. The saint wins a sympathetic, loving awe. In our experience we have felt the power of such saintly souls. We may connect our whole

notion of sainthood with this idea of power. True sainthood is the strong chain of God's presence in humanity running down through all history, and making of it a unity, giving it a large and massive strength, able to bear great things and to do great things too. This unity which the line of sainthood gives to history is the great point that shows its strength. You go to your saint and find God, working and manifest, in him. But he got near to God through some saint who lived before him. And that saint lighted his fire at some flame before him; and so the power of the sainthoods animates and fills the world. So holiness and purity, and truth and patience, daring and tenderness, hope and faith, are kept constant and pervading things in our humanity. In this truth we get the corrective that we need of the continual tendency to solitariness and individuality in our religion. This church of all the saints is a great power in the world. Ever from out the past, from the old saints who lived in other times, from Enoch, David, Paul, and John, Augustine, Jerome, Luther, Leighton, there comes down the power of God to us. Take away holy example, and the inspiration of holy men, and you would depopulate heaven. Only one bold, supreme soul here and there would still be able to scale the height alone, and stand triumphant in the glorious presence of God. We ascend by one another. These saints were incorporations, not of the power, nor of the truth, but of the spirit or the character of God. But in God Himself all three—power, and truth, and character—must go together; and so they will, to some extent, in the saint, who is God's copy—but not entirely. We must, however, clearly see the absence of power of miracle, or of authority in truth, in the saints of the Christian Church, because we must have some doctrine of sainthood which shall not for a moment dim or distort the leadership and perfect headship of the Christian and the Church, which rests in Christ alone. But Christ, as He leads us on to higher things, may still strengthen us with the company of those who have the same road to travel, and are walking it in the same strength. Are there no saints to-day? If sainthood means what we have said—the indwelling, the manifest indwelling, of God in man—then there must be many a very saintly saint in these late days of ours. There may be fewer supreme, pre-eminent saints, fewer out-reaching pinnacles of grace, in the long ranges of spiritual life. As all civilisation and human culture advances, great men become less common and less marked. Still, there are saints enough, if we only know how to find them. The old idea of sainthood demanded miracles of those whom it admitted to its calendar. It is the truer discrimination that recognises the presence of God in men, the saints that are in the world, not by the miracles they work, but by the miracles they are; by the way in which they bring the grace of God to bear on the simple duties of the household and the street. The saint is he in whom God dwells.—*Phillips Brooks.*

Vers. 13, 14. *The Redeemed in Glory.*—The Bible opens and closes with conflict—between evil and good. Opens with man defeated, closes with man victorious. So it tells the whole story of humanity. The reason for the difference is given us in the song which the victors sing—"Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." He that was defeated has become victor, because God Himself has helped him, and won a first and inclusive triumph for him in the person of His Son. The association of the text is a great multitude in the attitude of victors through Christ. It is important to Christian living that our thought should be often lifted to that world towards which we are hastening. We need to keep heaven near. And yet it is but little more than a shadow to us. The terms under which heaven is represented are figurative; of its realities we can know nothing. Figurative language

is an accommodation to the uncultured, imperfect mind. It is developed in the early history of nations. But how warm and bright and hopeful are the figures suggesting heaven! Mansions, or Homes. Wiping away tears. Rest. What holy joy and triumph are suggested by its crowns, and harps, and palms, and songs! What a glory is round about its throne!

I. **Heaven is not merely another place and other circumstances.**—We often cherish the notion that, if we could get away from present scenes, we should lose our troubles. In this hope we have made earthly changes; but did we *thus* lose the trouble? Many say, "Oh, to get my footsteps off this sin-burdened earth!" It is, therefore, needful to impress that heaven is, primarily, a change *in ourselves.* Heaven is *character* first, then *place* suited to character. White robes are but the expression of moral whiteness.

II. **The glorified in heaven keep their individuality.**—"Who are these?" Notice the minute account of the tribes, and the maintenance of tribal distinctions. This retention of our individuality is absolutely essential to a full and happy thought of heaven. Unity in variety—not in sameness—is the beauty of the earth. Single leaves; single faces. On the basis of individuality our friendships here are formed. If the redeemed have become merely spirits, our personal interest in them is almost gone. Illustrate by giving the dying hopes of Socrates.

III. **In heaven the connection with earth is not lost sight of.**—"Whence come they?" If Christ remembers Bethlehem and Calvary, well may we. This connection is to be a material element in our bliss. Earth is our battle-ground, the sphere in which we win our victories; it is not merely our place of probation. On earth we learn to estimate the rest, and prepare to enjoy the triumph of heaven. Illustrate by visits to a nation's battle-fields.

IV. **In heaven all merely earthly distinctions are lost.**—The angel says nothing about the host being rich or poor, noble or servile. The one characteristic is this: they are clothed in white robes, because blood-washed. The one qualification for heaven is personal interest in the work of Christ. There are two efficiencies in His work: He washes, and He sanctifies. Learn to look far deeper than earthly distinctions, and to value *character.* The title to the eternal feast is the wedding garment of sanctified character.

V. **Heaven helps us to understand and bear present tribulation.**—The white-robed came out of great tribulation. There is a direct connection between "tribulation" and "heaven." Describe the old threshing sledge. Life in general, and life for each individual, has its forms of tribulation. We want to be sure of its relation to the white robes. The Christian has two things to learn experimentally here on earth. 1. How to get his garments washed. 2. How to keep his garments clean. When he has learned both, he is fit for heaven. But he could learn neither without passing through great tribulation. Compare the things talked of in the earthly and heavenly worlds. We talk of the battle for money and position; they talk of the battle for character. We talk of the fashion of the garments that clothe our mortality: they talk of the blood-washed robes of the soul. We talk of success, and worship success; they talk of sanctified tribulation. By cherishing more of their spirit now, we shall be preparing ourselves by-and-bye to share their society.

Vers. 13-17. *The Redeemed in Heaven.*—This passage exhibits to us, first, the condition of the redeemed in heaven. That condition is marked, on the one hand, by a cessation from all suffering. They have *come out* of great tribulation 1. They are beyond the reach of *want.* "They shall hunger no more." 2. They are beyond the reach of *harm.* "The sun shall not light on them, nor any heat." That condition is marked, on the other hand, by the *perfection of all enjoyment.* Their enjoyment is trace-

able to three sources. (1) They stand in the immediate presence of God. "They are *before* the throne." (2) They are uninterruptedly engaged in His service. "They serve Him day and night." (3) They have access to sources of solid gratification. "The Lamb in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them," etc. The Lamb is here said to *lead* the flock; the anomaly is unavoidable. The figure is imperfect, and is sacrificed to the sentiment. The passage also distinctly exhibits the *ground* on which that condition is enjoyed; which is, *not* their having come out of great tribulation, but their "having washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Here are two things implied: the forgiveness of sin, indicated by their being *washed* in the blood; and the renewal of the character, indicated by their having their *robes washed*—robes being emblematical of character. It is their being pardoned, or justified, that is the strict and *only* ground of their admission to the blessedness of heaven; whilst their being sanctified qualifies them to enjoy it.

Ver. 16. *No Thirst in Heaven.*—A poor mangled German one night crawled out of his hospital bed in the delirium of fever following amputation. Somebody found him in the village street, moaning and raving alternately, while he tried to drag his bleeding body over the frozen earth. A kind Frenchwoman took him in and put warm wine to his lips, which were burning, while the rest of his frame was so cold. "No, no!" the poor soldier murmured; "I am only thirsty for my home and children;" and so, with that thirst unassuaged, and that heart-touching explanation of his dark journey, he died.—"*Daily Telegraph.*"

CHAPTER VIII.

FOUR TRUMPET VOICES.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

VER. 1. **Seventh seal.**—"The main visions give us more external aspects; the interposed visions show the inner and more spiritual aspects. The main visions give us the trumpet voices of God's manifold providences, summoning the world to surrender to Him; the subsidiary visions point to the witness and work of the true children of God in this world, and the more secret growth of the Church of Christ."

Ver. 2. **Seven angels.**—There was a popular Jewish belief in seven special angels as attendant on God (Tobit xii. 15). They may be taken as representing the "complete circle of God's power in judgment." "Symbols of that complete and varied messenger force which God evermore commands." **Seven trumpets.**—"The usual emblems of war and bloodshed; they are emblems of the series of judgments now to be inflicted." *Godet* regards the *trumpet* as "something more than the mere revelation of an event that is to happen in the future; it is a manifestation of Will, which calls for a speedy realisation."

Ver. 3. **Altar.**—In the Jewish Temple the priest was wont to burn incense, while the people outside were praying (Luke i. 8-11). **Offer it with.**—Lit. give, or add, it to the prayers. To use a phrase of modern Church life, the prayers are on the altar, and the angel-priest "censes the holy things."

Ver. 4. **With the prayers.**—Better "*for* the prayers"; *i.e.*, to ratify and consecrate them.

Ver. 5. **Cast it.**—"The burning incense may denote Christian worship. Then that which was pure worship, if defiled and degraded by human corruptions, becomes the instrument of discord and violence" (compare Exod. ix. 8-10). The hot ashes are the token of coming judgments; the ashes *fall*, to indicate that the judgments are at hand.

Ver. 7. **First angel.**—This is the aggravation of the judgments of the third seal—*famine.* **Blood.**—Here coloured rain, which does sometimes fall, and is regarded as a sure sign of coming agricultural evils.

Ver. 8. **Second angel sounded.**—The sea is smitten; its inhabitants perish; commerce is interrupted. Addition to previous calamity in the ocean sphere. **Mountain.**—Volcano. Bursting of volcanoes always affects the sea and shipping. Volcanoes are almost always near the sea.

Ver. 10. **Third angel sounded.**—See the fourth seal. **Star.**—Compare what we call shooting stars. Fatal results follow from the defilement of the waters men drink. Illustrate how civilisation tends to corrupt rivers, and springs, and induce pestilential disease. A terrible mortality seizes mankind.

Ver. 12. **Fourth angel.**—Judgment affecting the atmosphere. Note how dependent human health is on atmospheric conditions. (Illustrate by the plague of darkness in Egypt, Exod. x. 21-23.) The moral influence of eclipses, and other sky-portents, on the ancient mind must be taken into full account. These various plagues need not be understood in any allegorical sense; they represent the various distresses attendant (partly) on the sins of advancing civilisation, in the very midst of which, and even suffering under which, the Church of Christ has to live and labour.

Ver. 13. **Angel.**—Or eagle. This is introductory to the last three, or woe, trumpets. The three last trumpets are called "the three woes." The difference between the first four trumpets and three last appears to be this: the first concern the sphere of nature, the last the sphere of humanity. This eagle-angel's sight of woes that were coming suggests the "eagle-like judgments which fall upon the carcase of dead nations, or a dead Society."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—13.

Judgments Affecting Nature.—The servants of God being now secure against impending destruction, all things appear to be in readiness for the execution of justice upon the persecutors of the Church. One seal, and one only, remains to be broken of the volume in which their destiny is inscribed; and it seems as if this must introduce the consummation. It is evident that such is represented to be the impression on the great multitude who encircle the throne of God. They stand in silent and awful expectation of the sequel which must take place when that seal is broken. But the Lord is "slow to anger and of great mercy, not willing that any should perish, but that all should repent and be saved." "Judgment is His strange work," and delay does not prove that any uncertainty attends the final event. Besides, it had already been declared (chap. vi. 11), that some *delay* would take place until more martyrdoms should be accomplished. Here, then, the writer introduces various circumstances by which this is aptly brought about. The breaking of the last seal, instead of presenting a single symbol of a single event, is followed by a new series of events which is disparted into seven gradations, or stages, of accomplishment; and these are presented as becoming gradually more and more annoying and destructive to the enemies of the Church. *Trumpets*, the usual emblems of war and bloodshed, are chosen as emblems of the series of judgments now to be inflicted. The first four trumpets affect the earth, the sea, the rivers with the springs, and the heavens. The remaining three indicate judgments that fall more immediately upon man. The present chapter comprises the first four trumpets, and the evils which they introduce occur in the order already named. But before any of the trumpets are sounded, symbols are presented in heaven of the judgments about to take place. The supplication of the saints for the relief of the Church comes up before God, along with the incense which is presented before His throne; and the answer which will be made to these supplications is symbolised by the action of an angel, who casts fire down upon the earth, which calls forth thunder, lightning, and earthquake, all indicative of future destruction to the enemies of the Church.—*Moses Stuart.*

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 1. *The Way to Rest is Through Trouble.*—We reach, in the seventh seal, the eternal quiet of God's presence. Through a series of visions we have been shown that the way to rest is not easy, that we must be prepared to see the great features of earth's troubles remain till the close, and that the children of God must, through tribulation, and even persecution, enter the kingdom of God's peace. The seals answer the question, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom?" But the kingdom will be restored. The Church may find her way a way of difficulty, delay, danger; but it will be a way to triumph. The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of the Lord. Let the people of God go forward; let their prayers be set forth as incense; let them blow the trumpet, and summon men to repentance. They are not alone; the Lord still fights for His Israel. This is the assurance which we gather from the trumpets. In all the wondrous providences which the history of the earth discloses, we may hear the trumpet-voice which heralds the kingdom of Christ, to which the Church is bearing constant and sufficient witness (chap. xi. 3, 4). The seals close with peace; the trumpets close appropriately with victory (chap. xi. 15). The visions are not scenes of events which chronologically succeed one another. The one set shows us the way through trouble to rest; the other shows us the way through conflict to triumph: the one set shows us the troubles which befall the Church because of the world; the other shows us the troubles which fall on the world because the Church advances to the conquest of the world, as Israel to the possession of the land of promise.—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

Silence in Heaven.

This silence was—

I. **Wonderful.** — Wonderful, considering—1. The multitude present; they must have been under perfect control. 2. Their feelings. Joy and wonder yearned to express themselves.

II. **Instructive.**—1. Nothing done in haste, or in the heat of excitement. 2. Time for thought furnished to both friends and foes of God. 3. The shortness of the silence a sign that the work of God is not long delaying; the praises of saints are only temporarily interrupted.—*Anon.*

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIFTH AND SIXTH WOE-TRUMPETS.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

VER. 1. **Fall.**—Better, "fallen"; that had fallen. A star would seem to represent a false teacher. Some think Mahomet is referred to. He claimed to have received instructions from Gabriel. And he let loose a flood of evils on the earth. But it is doubtful whether any personal identifications are permissible. The typical and symbolical character should be preserved. **Bottomless pit.**—Better, "pit of the abyss"; inner prison; lowest deep (Luke viii. 31). The word "deep" describes the abode of the evil spirits. "This verse suggests a vast depth, approached by a pit or shaft, whose top, or mouth, is covered. Dante's "Inferno," with its narrowing circles winding down to the central shaft, is somewhat similar. The abyss is the lowest spring of evil, whence the worst dangers arise."—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

Ver. 2. **Darkened by reason of the smoke.**—"The enemy is at work (in the conflict of the Church with evil), seeking to obscure the Church's light by the diffusion of dark and low-born thoughts.

Ver. 3. **Locusts.**—Not the insect, but evil spirits, whose influence and work can be represented by locusts. *Godet's* note marks every point of this figure: "From out the bottomless pit, the dwelling-place of devils, issue a cloud of evil spirits, represented under the image of locusts, of brilliant and attractive colours, but armed with the sting of a scorpion, and who for five months (the time during which, in the East, the plague of locusts lasts—May to December) throw into a kind of delirium—not of joy, but of deep sadness—mankind, crushed under the weight of its struggle with the Almighty. It is as if the inhabitants of the earth were subjected to *possession* on a great scale, after the likeness of the single instances of the kind which we find in the gospel history." These times of delusion, and possession—of fanatics and fanaticism—bear very seriously on the Christian Church, carrying even its members away.

Ver. 4. **Not hurt the grass.**—As they were not to do the mischievous work of actual locusts, we are to understand that actual locusts are not meant.

Ver. 5. **Not kill them.**—They were to produce a *living* misery. The poison of scorpions is so acid that it causes great agony. This is the figure here.

Ver. 6. **Seek death.**—As an end to their misery.

Ver. 7. **Like unto horses.**—There is an imagined likeness between the head of the locust and the mailed head of a horse. **Crowns.**—With possible allusion to decorations on war-horses' heads.

Ver. 8. **Hair of women.**—It is said that, in Arabic poetry, the same comparison is used of the antennæ of the natural locust. **Teeth as lions.**—Joel. i. 6. *Alford* sees in this vision "a great symbolical army, multitudinous as locusts, malicious as scorpions, ruling as kings, intelligent as men, wily as womanhood, bold and fierce as lions, resistless as those clad in iron armour. The locust-like army has characteristics partly human, partly diabolical, partly civilised, partly barbarous." It may be best to see in this description the various delusions, infatuations, fanaticisms, which have afflicted humanity, and put Christ's Church in peril, idealised. This explains the mixture of metaphor.

Ver. 11. **Abaddon, Apollyon.**—The destroyer. Not an historical person, but the representative of the destructive spirit. "The genius of destruction—bodily and spiritual."

Ver. 13. **Sixth angel sounded.**—This woe is an invasion of foreign nations coming out of the East, and causing everywhere ruin and disaster.

Ver. 14. **Loose the four angels.**—These are the angels of invasion. No actual reference to the Euphrates must be sought for, but what the Euphrates symbolises. Rivers do not actually bind angels. The Euphrates was the great military barrier between the great northern and southern kingdoms. It may symbolise the providence which kept Eastern delusions and fanaticisms from passing over to the West. When the barrier was broken a flood of evils poured into Europe. But it cannot be said that this reference to Euphrates is satisfactorily explained.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1—12.

The Locust Symbols.—The interpretation of these visions is most difficult, but we must bear in mind that they are descriptive of that great war which the Church is waging with the world, which good is waging with evil, but the end of which, we are assured, is the victory of the good. The kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of His Christ (chap. xi. 15), but during the progress of the war the issue will often appear doubtful—nay, even the triumph may seem to be in the hand of the enemy; but faith disregards the back-flowing waves, for she knows the tide is coming in. We have seen that the advance of Christianity is marked by the manifestation of evils as well as the establishment of good. Christianity does not create evils, but the very intense honesty of her principles reveals the hidden force of unsuspected corruption. Thus the faith of Christ is come to give light unto the world, but in her progress many lights fall—the false lights of world-power, world-wisdom, false religionism, heresies. The enemy, too, is at work, and seeks to obscure her light by the diffusion of low and earth-born thoughts. The smoke of the pit blackens the light, and confuses the atmosphere. Now, this obscuration is surely the diffusion on earth of evil thoughts and ideas, the spirit of falsehood and hate, hostility to truth, and emnity against God and man. The bright, clear air, made gladsome by the sun, is darkened; "all forms, that once appeared beautiful, become hideous." In the history of advancing truth there will come times when confused ideas will darken simple truth and right, and out of the darkness will emerge strange and mongrel teachings, with a certain enforced unity, but without moral harmony—a medley of fair and hideous, reasonable and barbarous, dignified and debased, which enslave and torment mankind. The outcome of these teachings is often war and tyrannous oppression, but the sacred seer teaches us distinctly that those who hold fast by the seal of God are those who cannot be injured, for he would have us remember that the true sting of false conceptions is not in the havoc of open war, but in the wounded soul and conscience.—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 13—21.

The Second Woe-Trumpet.—The aim of the plague is to exhibit the death-working power of false thoughts, false customs, false beliefs, and to rouse men to forsake the false worships, worldliness, and self-indulgence, into which they had fallen (vers. 20, 21). The enemy against whom these foes are gathered is the great world, lost in false thoughts, luxurious ways, dishonest customs—that world which, in the very essential genius of its nature, is hostile to goodness and the God of goodness. But the hosts which come against this sin-drowned world are not merely plagues, as famine and pestilence; they are plagues which are the result of the world-spirit, and are, to a great extent, therefore, the creation of those who suffer. For there are evils which are loosed upon the world by the natural action of sin and sinful customs. We should notice that the historical basis of the Apocalypse is the past history of God's chosen people. The Apocalypse shows us the same principles working in higher levels and in wider arena. The Israel of God, the Church of Christ, with its grand opportunities, takes the place of the national Israel. (But its experiences are similar, and each set of experiences helps us in the understanding of the other.) The people who are victorious by faith at Jericho lay themselves open, by their timid worldliness, to the dangers of a Babylonish foe. The plague which falls on the spirit of worldliness does not spare the worldliness in the Church. The overthrow of corrupted systems bearing the Christian name is not a victory of the world over the Church, but of the Church over the world. The history of Israel is in much the key to the history of the world.—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IX.

Ver. 7. *Horses in Battle.*—"The Mamalukes, wearing their beards long and rough, with graue and sterne countenance, hauing strong and able bodies, vsed such cunning in all their fights and battels that, after they had giuen the first charge with their launces, they would by and bye, with wonderful actiuitie, vse their bows and arrows, casting their targuets behind them; and forthwith the horseman's mace, or crooked scimitar, as the manner of the battel or place required. Their horses were strong and couragious, in making and swiftnesse much like unto the Spanish jennets; and that which is of many hardly beleeued, so docile, that at certaine signes or speeches of the rider they would with their teeth reach him up from the ground a launce, an arrow, or such like thing; and as if they had known the enemie, run vpon him with open mouth, and lash at him with their heeles, and had by nature and custom learned, not to be afraid of any thing. These couragious horses were commonly furnished with siluer bridles, guilt trappings, rich saddles, their necks and brests armed with plates of yron; the horseman himselfe was commonly content with a coat of maile or a brest plate of yron. The chiefe and wealthiest of them vsed head pieces: the rest a linnen covering of the head, curiously folded into manie wreathes, wherewith they thought themselves safe ynough against any handie strokes; the common souldiers vsed thrumb'd caps, but so thicke that no sword could pierce them."—*Knolles.*

Vers. 7-10. *Locusts.*—These great grasshopper-looking insects have been sad scourges to mankind, and the Egyptian plague of them has happened more than once since that early date. Africa, especially that part near to Egypt, has been at different times infested by myriads of these creatures, which have consumed nearly every green thing. The effects of the havoc committed by them may be estimated by the famine they occasioned. St. Augustine mentions a plague of this kind in Africa, which destroyed no less than eight hundred thousand men in the kingdom of Masinissa alone, and many more in the lands near the sea. It is also related that in the year 591 great hosts of locusts migrated from Africa into Italy, and after grievously ravaging the country, were cast into the sea, and there arose a pestilence from their stench, which killed nearly a million men and beasts. In the territory of Venice, in 1478, more than thirty thousand persons are said to have perished in a famine occasioned by the devastation of the locusts, and instances of their dreadful numbers have been recorded in France, Spain, and Germany. In different parts of Russia, Hungary, Poland, Arabia, India, and other countries, the locusts have come at regular intervals. In the accounts of the invasions of locusts, the statements, which appear most marvellous, relate to the prodigious mass of matter which encumbers the sea wherever they are blown into it, and the pestilence arising from its putrefaction. Their dead bodies are said to have been, in some places, heaped one upon the other to the depth of four feet, in Russia, Poland, and Lithuania; and when, in South Africa, they were driven into the sea by a north-west wind, they formed, says Barrow, a bank three or four feet high along the shore. When we consider the forests that are stripped of their foliage, and the earth of its green garment for thousands of square miles, it may well be supposed that the volume of animal matter produced may equal that of herds of large animals accidentally falling into the sea. Nevertheless, unless Augustine had been a saint, the death of so many men would have been doubted.

CHAPTER X.

THE OPEN BOOK.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

"AND yet, notwithstanding all these calamities—last appeals from the Divine holiness to the conscience of man—men do not come to themselves. They continue to live in their idolatrous and corrupt practices. The seventh trumpet is preceded by an episode which has specially in view the destiny of Israel in the crisis which is coming on. In order clearly to indicate that we are here dealing with a scene by itself, and, as it were, isolated in the midst of the great apocalyptic drama, the author makes it the subject of a special *little book*, inserted within the great one. John is to *eat* it. This represents the most complete spiritual assimilation. This nourishment is to strengthen him for taking up again the great prophecy relating to 'peoples and nations, and tongues and kings' (chap. x. 11). The contents of 'the little book,' which are at once joyful and bitter, are comprehended in chap. xi. 1-13 (*Godet*). The 'little book' certainly indicates a supplementary prophecy, introducing a fuller account of the rise, progress, decline, and restoration, of Christianity, preparatory to the revelations of the seventh trumpet. This account is presented in a twofold form. 1. In the discourse of the angel (chap. xi. 1-13). 2. In the visions seen by St. John, chap. xii. 1-14" (*W. and W.*).

Ver. 1. **Another mighty angel.**—This angel comes as the representative, and in the power of, Christ, to remind God's secret ones that Christ is with them "all the days," and will surely instruct them as to their conduct amid these calamities. **Clothed with a cloud.**—The token always of the Divine presence. **Rainbow.**—Chap. iv. 3. Token of covenant. **Sun**, etc. See figures of chap. i.

Ver. 2. **Little book.**—Contrasted with the book of chap. v. 1. The attitude of the angel symbolises his taking possession of the whole world. The contents of the little book are partly given in the following chapter.

Ver. 4. **Write them not.**—The idea is that some things are only for those who have ears to hear. St. John may hear and understand, but it is useless to expect others to understand. Compare our Lord's words, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

Ver. 6. **Time no longer.**—Not "finite time," as opposed to "eternity." The idea of time here is *delay*. There shall be no time lost before judgment shall fall. The suffering saints had cried, "How long?" They were bidden to wait awhile. Now they are told that they will have to wait no longer.

Ver. 7. **Mystery of God.**—"The whole of His plan and of His counsel concerning this earth in its present state of discipline and of imperfection—all that God means to do upon it and towards it, even till that which we read of as the "time of the end" (Dan. xii. 4-9).

Ver. 9. **Eat it up.**—"Thoroughly consider and digest it," "make its contents your own" (see Ezek. ii. 8, iii. 3). **Belly bitter**, etc.—The first effect of being admitted to share in the Divine counsels is delightful, but when those counsels are known and realised, they may cause grave distress and anxiety; the Christ-like sorrow for those against whom God's wrath is revealed, who "knew not the time of their visitation." The devouring of the book is a figure for the thorough and eager perusal of it. What the seer learns by the reading is matter both for joy, and grief: for joy, because of the good tidings respecting the faithful disciples of Christ; of grief, because of the evils which were to come upon many who would persevere in their wickedness.

Note on the "Little Open Book."—It is that gospel which is the sword of the Spirit, the weapon of the Church, that Word of God, open to all, hidden only from those whom the god of this world has blinded. The fallen powers may bear the key, and let loose darkening clouds of confused thought and unworthy teaching; the outer courts of the Church may be overcast; but unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness, and God's Word has risen with new light and power upon the bewilderments and glooms of the age.—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

CHAPTER XI.

THE FATE OF JERUSALEM AND ITS TEMPLE.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

THE paragraph, vers. 1-13, gives the contents of the "little book," which are in part joyful and in part bitter. The marking off of a portion of the temple answers to the sealing of the hundred and forty-four thousand in chap. vii. Here there is a symbolical reserve of a portion of the temple from impending evils, as there a reserve of an elect portion of God's people. "Just as those were sealed to mark them for ever as the heritage of God, so is the temple measured as destined to remain His domain for ever. The temple, together with the court, is here the emblem of the Jewish nation, one part of which will remain faithful to its God—that represented by the temple measured by the angel, with the altar and its worshippers; and the other part, carnal Israel, will give itself up to the spirit of apostasy which will carry captive the Gentiles."

Ver. 1. **Reed.**—Canon: the word may mean *staff*, *pen*, or light measuring rod (Ezek. xl. 3; Rev. xxi. 15). **Angel stood.**—Omit; but assume the speaker to be he who gave the rod. **Temple,** etc.—Treat as symbols of the people of God within the Jewish people. Temple with *all* its courts symbolises the *whole* Jewish people. The measuring was for the reserving of this portion.

Ver. 2. **Without.**—Outside, or beyond. Here the ordinary worshippers assembled. **Leave out.**—Despise, neglect, take no trouble with. **Gentiles.**—Probably alluding to Romans. **Tread under foot.**—Luke xxi. 24. **Forty and two months.**—See ver. 3, chap. xii. 14; and compare Dan. vii. 25, xii. 7, 11. Not an exact, or literal period; to be treated typically, of a prolonged, but strictly limited, time. "It is the pilgrimage period of the Church, the period of the world's power, during which it seems to triumph."

Ver. 3. *Bishop Boyd Carpenter* thus explains the aim of the present vision: "It explains that in the great progress towards victory the Church itself will suffer, through corruptions and worldliness, but the true temple—the kernel, so to speak, of the Church—will be unharmed and kept safe in her Master's hands. But the position of this hidden and enshrined Church will not be one of idle security. In that temple will be reared those who will witness, undaunted and undefiled, for their Lord; throughout the whole of that chequered period of profanation and pain there will never be wanting true witnesses for righteousness and faith." **Two witnesses.**—Not to be regarded as actual persons; compare Zech. iv. 6, 7. The idea is that there should always be some, even in a decaying, imperilled Church, who, in the special power of Divine grace, should witness against prevailing evils. In every age God has His specially appointed and sustained witnesses. "As God raised up prophets in the ancient Church, to witness against the idolatrous corruptions of religion, so there should be some in every age to testify against the iniquity and idolatry of their times.

Ver. 4. **Candlesticks.**—Lamp-stands, to hold up the light of God's claims and truth.

Ver. 5. **Will.**—*I.e.*, wishes to. **Fire.**—Compare Jer. v. 14; 2 Kings i. 10. Evidently Old-Testament individuals and narratives suggest these figures.

Ver. 6. **Shut heaven.**—As Elijah. **Power over waters,** etc.—As Moses.

Ver. 7. **Beast.**—A familiar symbol for any noxious, powerful, and dangerous enemy. "A beast-spirit, which is in utter hostility to the Christ-spirit" (see Dan. vii.). **Kill them.**—This typifies the temporary triumph of worldliness over the witnesses to high spiritual life. "Men can silence, can conquer, can slay the witness for a higher, purer, nobler life. They have done so." But men may always reckon upon the resurrection of God's witnesses. He never leaves Himself without a witness.

Ver. 8. **Great city.**—Jerusalem. See Isa. i. 10; Jer. xvi. 46; Ezek. xxiii. 8.

Ver. 11. **Stood upon their feet.**—Compare Ezekiel's vision of the "valley of dry bones."

Ver. 15. **Seventh angel sounded.**—The angel who will sound the trumpet of Christ's final triumph, or the trump of doom. This trumpet, or third woe, has reference to the appearing of the Antichrist. Ver. 14 takes up the thread of the general vision. *Godet* says: "We shall see that it is the reign of Antichrist which brings upon men the last calamities, represented by the seven vials; hence it follows that these latter are included in the seventh trumpet, just as the seven trumpets formed the contents of the seventh seal. There is great art in this way of picturing history as a series of periods, each of which arises out of

the last term of the period which precedes it. In this simple image is expressed one of the profoundest laws of the progress of the world."

In vers. 15-18 the end of the great struggle is anticipated, and the mingled rejoicing in heaven, and woe on earth, is indicated. With this assurance of final victory we are prepared for all the terrible scenes that make up the sublime conflict of the ages. It must be constantly kept in view that the one aim of St. John is the comfort and assurance of God's people in their persecution, peril, and fear; therefore it is that these recurring visions of the triumph of some, and the final triumph of all, are given.

Ver. 15. **His Christ.**—Compare "Lord's anointed" (Luke ii. 26).

Ver. 16. **Sat before God.**—Better, "which are before God, sitting upon their thrones."

Ver. 17. Omit here "art to come."

Ver. 19. **Ark of His Testament.**—It is almost always better to read "covenant." The third woe brought on the inhabitants of the earth is the ruin and downfall of the Antichristian kingdom; but this is only a woe from the earthly point of view. It is a cause of rejoicing in the heavenly spheres.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—19.

The Prophecy of the Two Witnesses.—Here comes in another interposition—viz., that in respect to saving a part of the temple, like to that in chap. vii., with respect to saving Christians from impending evils. Christians, indeed, have already been made secure in the case before us. But the close of the Jewish or Mosaic institutions is near at hand. Shall *all* which pertained to these now go to ruin? Or is there not something that constitutes the *essential unity* of religion under both dispensations which is worthy of preservation, and which, therefore, must be preserved? If the ground taken by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews is correct (which we may well believe) then the *basis* of Judaism and Christianity is the same. The introduction of the two witnesses has been the occasion of much controversy, chiefly because effort has been made to identify the persons referred to, and because the symbolical use of the number two has not been recognised. *Stuart* explains this chapter, and the meaning of these witnesses, in the following way: "In Rev. vi. 11, the martyrs, supplicating for retribution upon the enemies and persecutors of the Church, are told that they must wait for awhile, until the number of martyrs becomes augmented, and the iniquity of their persecutors comes to its full completion. Against the judgments of heaven which are to overtake the latter, Christians in general are secured by the seal of God impressed upon their foreheads (chap. vii.). Here, in chap. xi., which brings us to the close of the first catastrophe, we have a picture of the renewed and bitter efforts of the enemies of the Church to destroy it, even at the period when destruction was impending over themselves. In this way the reader is prepared to acquiesce in the doom which awaits them on the sounding of the seventh and last trumpet. Nor is this all. The long-suffering of God is thus displayed towards His once beloved people. They are exhorted to repentance while destruction is impending, in order that they may escape. Prophets, furnished with miraculous powers, like those of Moses and Elijah, so as to give full proof of their Divine mission, are sent to them. But they will not hear. When the time fixed by heaven for their probation is past, those prophets are given up to the persecuting fury of their enemies, and they fall a sacrifice. Yet the cause which they advocated is not rendered hopeless by this. It is not even weakened; for the martyrs are raised from the dead, and ascend in triumph to heaven. In other words, 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church,' for the Church becomes victorious by the deadly assaults made upon it. The enemies of religion may, indeed, bring upon themselves swift destruction by their malignity; they do so. But the Church will rise and triumph, and enjoy continued Divine protection and favour amid all the trials to which it can be subjected. That literally *two*, and only two witnesses were to appear in these times of peculiar wickedness; that they were to be literally raised from the dead, and ascend to heaven, etc.;—we need not

strive to disprove in commenting on such a book as the Apocalypse. But why are there *two* witnesses mentioned. Partly, because two are a competent number to establish any matter (see Deut. xvii. 6, xix. 15; Num. xxxv. 30; John v. 30-33; Matt. xviii. 16). The apostles and disciples were sent out in pairs. Compare also the combinations, Moses and Aaron, Elijah and Elisha, Zerubbabel and Joshua, Peter and John. The meaning is that a competent number of Divinely commissioned and faithful Christian witnesses, endowed with miraculous powers, should bear testimony against the corrupt Jews, during the last days of their commonwealth, respecting their sins. All beyond this is mere costume and symbol." *Godet's* explanation runs along the same lines, but brings out some fresh and suggestive homiletic points. "The last signal—that of the seventh trumpet—is preceded, as the opening of the seventh seal had been, by a scene of an encouraging tendency—that of the two witnesses. This episode refers, as did the former of the two which prepared for the seventh seal, to the destinies of the Jewish people. This subject is so important that it is treated here in a little book, which forms, as it were, a parenthesis in the great book. It is the announcement (already anticipated in the prophetic vision itself) of the conversion of Israel. The faithful Jews, together with the hundred and forty-four thousand (chap. vii.) are seen prostrated in the holy place before the golden altar (the symbol of Judaism) in an ideal temple; for the material temple is no longer in existence. They are awaiting the new revelation, which is to carry them on a step farther, into the most holy place. The mass of the people are given up to the Gentiles, who tread them under foot. The author here reproduces the exact words of Jesus: 'Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.' John does not, any more than Jesus, use the expression, 'to tread under foot,' in a literal sense. The subject in his mind is that of the moral domination of the Gentiles over Israel, and of the *apostasy*, becoming ever more and more general, of that ancient elect people, in abjuring the Divine principle of their national existence, and basely seeking to identify themselves with the heathen nations amongst whom they were scattered. Thus, whilst the elect part of the nation, by their unshaken fidelity, prepare themselves for a sacred mission, the mass of the people—that constitute the outer court given up to the Gentiles—degrade and materialise themselves more and more to the level of the heathen. In the midst of this defection appear—as did in ancient times Enoch in the midst of the degenerate children of Seth, Moses before Israel corrupted by Egyptian idolatry, Elijah amongst the ten tribes who had become almost completely *Paganised*—the two witnesses, whose preaching, as well as their dress and acts of power, preach repentance to Israel. But—and this is surprising—the beast now appears upon the scene, though his coming has not yet been described. The reason is that the contents of the little book constitute a special prophecy within the great one. We shall see later on why the Antichrist thinks it expedient to leave Rome, his capital, and to take up his abode at Jerusalem. The two witnesses are killed by him, but they come to life again miraculously. The city is smitten with an earthquake, and one part of the inhabitants are swallowed up by it. The remainder of the people, and particularly those who have been specially reserved for these supreme moments, give glory to God, and are converted to Him. Accordingly, we shall find, in chap. xiv., the hundred and forty-four thousand surrounding the Lamb between the time of the Advent and that of the destruction of the Antichrist. This picture is well adapted to encourage the Church in presence of the terrible conflict she is about to be called on to sustain. She knows now beforehand that she will have within humanity itself a powerful ally—that is, the people of peoples, of which the elect part will occupy a central place in the Christian army, and form a kind of bodyguard of the Lamb."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 15. *Christ's Final Triumph.*—The book of Revelation is difficult to interpret. No principle of interpretation has yet gained universal acceptance. Some see in it mere history—blended human and Church history. Some would have us find chiefly the history of the Church, and only indirect references to nations or individuals. Some regard it as a story that is past. Others regard it as even now in its unfolding. And some treat it as the history of spiritual truth in its contact and conflict with error. Our difficulties arise from the fact that we have no wide and comprehensive view of God's administration of the world, and purpose concerning it. We do not enter into God's thought in guiding His world on its course through so many ages, sustaining it through so many changes, and peopling it with such an ever-teeming multitude of living beings. There must be some sublime end towards which God, by processes which we call slow, is ever moving. As surely as geological science unfolds the story of a series of material changes, running on through uncounted ages, preparing the earth for the abode of man, so surely is the history of our earth the story of great moral and spiritual changes and progressions, preparing man for some higher and sublimer destiny. And as we stand wondering over that record of geological eras, amazed that God should take so long to prepare the earth for man, so do we stand wondering over these moral and spiritual ages, these succeeding "dispensations"; this apparent ebb and flow, these triumphs and failures, these boundings, and walkings, and creepings, out of all which God is preparing man for the glory which is to be. The great end can never be lost out of God's thought. So far as we can discern it, reading it under the symbol and imagery that veil, while they disclose, its mystery, it is this: the full restoration of the whole moral world to harmony with Himself. He is working to secure that all the wills of all moral beings should freely choose to be in accordance with, and submission to, His Divine Will. All humanity is to repeat after the Christ-man, "Thy will be done." All the changes of the world's history have been working towards this sublime end. Patriarchal simplicity, Jewish ceremonial, Pagan idolatry, civilised learning, unities of commerce, warrings of nations, blendings of races, emigration of surplus populations, and the special forces of Christianity and the Christian civilisation—all these things may be thought of as winds from various quarters, blowing at various times, and in various degrees, pressing on the sails of the great vessel of humanity, and bearing it forward towards the love and service of the One Living God. If we are to get full possession of this great thought of God concerning humanity, we must first see that all—every one—of God's human creatures must be a subject of interest to Him. You may say, "But surely no one ever doubts that God 'maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust?'" We readily admit it as a general interest to create, preserve, feed, and clothe; but what many of us have yet to see is, that God has a *saving* interest in every human creature He has made—an interest of grace. He "willeth not the death of a sinner, but that he turn from his wickedness and live." We gain new views of God's dealing with the world when, emancipated from old prejudices, we can say, with St. Peter, "Now I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but, in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of Him"; or with Paul, who could stand before a company of Pagan Greeks, and argue with them on the ground of the universal Fatherhood. "God, that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and

earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands. . . . He hath made of one blood all nations of the earth, . . . hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us; for in Him we live, and move, and have our being—as certain, also, of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'" Which of us is so fully in fellowship with God's great purpose that he could stand before the superstitious Hindoo, the degraded savage from the islands of the seas, the wretched African from whom well-nigh the semblance of humanity itself has passed, and, without a faltering in his voice, assure them all that they were gathered up into the kindly thought of God, objects of the *saving* will of the great God that made them. Brethren in the one Divine creation, God wills them to be brethren too in the one Divine redemption. Till we can do that, without a question or a doubt, we prove that we are as yet out of sympathy with God's thought for humanity. This world becomes a new world, this life a new life, moral influences new powers, when we can stand beside God and, as He does, take humanity itself into the great grasp of our love. "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die, saith the Lord of Hosts, and not that he should return from his ways and live?" But if it is God's will, God's purpose, to bring the world into fellowship with Himself, the means employed must be such—wholly such, and only such—as He Himself is pleased to choose. Those means may be, to a large extent, beyond our full comprehension. Some we may have to use; some we may a little understand; the whole will be beyond us. We are sometimes found foolish enough even to test God's ways by our ideas concerning the best ways. We say, "These cannot be God's ways, because they are not such as we should have taken." We even venture to test God's plans by their seeming results, and say, "These cannot be God's ways, because they do not seem successful." Some say, "At the present rate of conversions, how long will it take to convert the world?" Men will try and prove to us that the increase of conversions is not equal to the increase of population, and therefore the present means, the preaching of the gospel, cannot be God's means for converting the world. The answer to such strange calculations is very simple. We are only servants; we are not let into the secrets that belong to the Master. Servants have nothing to do with results and issues of work, only with faithfulness to duty. Moreover, we cannot measure results as God can. We could not make any true or trustworthy sum upon such a subject. And the uttermost apparent failure would not blot out one word of that command which ever animates God's servants to consecrated toil, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned." God might, conceivably, have healed up the wounds of humanity by one touch of His mighty hand; He might have restored to harmony all the notes of creation, set ajar by sin, as in a moment; He might have pieced up again, set in order, all the broken fragments of the moral creation by one sublime exertion of His power. Did an evil force enter our social system, and disturb the relations of the planets, God's fiats could, in a moment of time, destroy that force, and restore the perfections of movement and of place. But God has no occasion for doing even that. He works in nature in accordance with the laws He has Himself impressed upon the creatures He has made. Instead of making a home for man in a week of seven days, He guided the working of the laws he had fixed in the original elements, and wrought a final witness as the issue of the conflicts and the unfoldings of ages. It may be conceivable that God could have forced our moral nature into a complete subjection to His will (I cannot conceive

it, but perhaps some persons can); God could have driven sin away from His world with a breath. He has not, however, done so. He has been pleased persistently to act in the line of those laws according to which He created man, and especially in the line of that law, of personal liberty—free will, we call it—which He made man's supreme dignity. So far as we can read the purpose of God in dealing with our world, He intends to bring men back to His love and favour entirely by the use of moral motives, moral influences. He means to move the heart of man by such exhibitions of Himself, and of His gracious relations, that the very heart of the world shall be won to Him. That is the meaning of the fact that all the moral influences affecting man for God seem to be gathered up into the one manifestation of God in Christ to the world. Moral force reaches its climax, its supreme development, in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. By that cross God touches the very inmost of the human heart. He speaks therein to man by the mightiest power that can reach him, the power of a self-sacrificing love. Jesus declared the sublime moral power that streams forth from Calvary when He said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." Now, if that is God's highest power to move human hearts, and to draw men unto Himself; if God has, as it were, gone beyond Himself in the sacrifice of His Son; if that is His sublime Evangel, His gospel for the world, His way for winning souls;—surely we cannot be wrong in preaching Christ the wide world over; we cannot be wrong in telling every human brother of the Lamb God has provided for a sin-offering. We cannot be wrong in sending out heralds to the most distant and most degraded places of the earth, to lift up, in sight of men everywhere, the cross of Jesus. Result or no result, success or no success, God surely knows the wisdom and grace of His own plan; it is enough for us, if, swayed ourselves by the moral power of the cross of Calvary, we give, we labour, we pray, that the whole world may one day be uplifted in the eternal light and love of that cross. The day is coming—certainly coming—towards it all holy living and all holy toiling are most positively tending—when the magnificent song of our text shall be sung by a ransomed and redeemed universe—"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ." This glorious hope has always been held before the Church, and it has exercised a most important influence on all its life and labour. That gospel which is the highest form of moral influence, gathers into itself, and uses up, all kinds of moral influence. It sways by the force of gratitude, deepening ever the service to which it calls by the thought of redemption, and ransom, and purchase by precious blood. It moves by personal affection; constraining by the force of our love to One whom we increasingly esteem as "the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely." It excites the holiest ambitions; holds forth as inspiration the possibility of the noblest achievements; offers work of the highest character, and bids us aim at the spiritual conquest of the whole world. It touches our faculty of hope, paints for us a final victory in comparison with which the victories of all earth's battle-fields are but as children's soldier table-play—a victory so sublime in its character, and so far-reaching in its issues, as shall make reasonable to our view all the years of waiting, all the faintings of hope deferred. The Church of Christ has found the blessing of this great hope for herself, for the nourishment of her own spirit, and the strengthening of her own faith. So far as the Church has been a living Church, it has found the value of this great hope. The more the Church rejoices in its privileges, the more does it long that its King should receive His full royal rights. When the Church has been flagging and failing, its renewal has come in visions of the glory of the day that is coming.

Dimmed by the foul breath of the evil rife in an age covered over with crowding life-cares, the Church has known the dimness pass, and the covering be lifted off, when it caught sight again of the glory of that day when "the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever." The Church has found the blessing of this hope in its times of decay and persecution. That is, whenever it has been a *suffering* Church. The story of Christ's Church has been no even tale, no simple on-moving, and ever-growing towards its end. Sometimes the river has overflowed its banks, and hurried along with the swift current of revival and holy zeal; sometimes the waters have lain very low in the bed, and seemed scarcely to care to move onwards. Those were days of sluggishness and decline. Sometimes the full stream has moved slowly, noiselessly along, exhaling on either side its fertilising moistures. At times the kings of the earth have favoured Christianity, and it has had its days of prosperity and world-triumph. And, yet again, it has been a despised thing; it has known the holier days of trial and sorrow, of martyr fires, and wearying prison, and torturing rack. What has kept alive the faith, the fervour, the steadfastness of holy men and women in those suffering days? Surely it was their vision of the Lamb, who goeth forth conquering and to conquer. And not in her times of persecution only; in those other times of suffering, when the tides of evil rose high, and were driven on with fierce winds, when the Church seemed helpless to resist the desolating encroachments, and could only, with an infinite sadness, watch the sight—humanity drifting away into error, and superstition, and pride, and woe. Those are the most trying times for Christ's Church. Then its faith is most severely tested. What holds the Church to its allegiance, save its persistent hoping for the day when the "kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ"? Who that knows those wonderful letters written with such overflowing emotion by Samuel Rutherford but will remember how, in the shadows of his prison-house, his very soul thrilled within him in longing for the full royal rights of that King whom he so quaintly, but so tenderly, calls "his sweet Lord Jesus"? The Church has found the blessing of this hope in its days of toil and sacrifice. That is, whenever it has been a labouring Church. It has, indeed, always been a labouring and an aggressive Church. They would have us believe, in these days, that our forefathers were wrong in expecting the world would be converted through their sanctified labours. If they were wrong, it was a strange sort of wrong, for it exercised a most ennobling influence upon them. They are a good company. We may well join them. There is Paul, not counting his life dear if only he can get opportunities for lifting up Christ. Peter declaring he cannot but speak out the things he has seen and heard. Austin visiting the then benighted isle of Britain, so that he might lift up Christ to our forefathers. Luther, braving the opposition of those in authority, in rendering his testimony for Christ. But time would fail if I tried to speak of Huss, and Wickliffe, and Savonarola, and Bernard, and Whitefield, and Wesley, and Haldane, and Hill, and Moody, and all the host of devoted missionaries, who have gone forth, consecrating all life, all powers, to the service of their redeeming Christ. Witnesses for Christ when the witness was denied. Preachers of Christ when the Word fell on stopped ears. What was it sustained them in thus labouring, and ceasing their labour only with their life? It was the hope of that coming day—always coming—when the "kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ." Do you think that we, in these latter days, can afford to lose out of our lives the force, the impulse, the thrill, of this Divinely assured hope?

Are we so strong that we can live our Christian lives, and render our Christian witness, well without it? In this cold, calculating, business age of ours, can our Christian life be vigorous and bright, and pure, without the passion of love and anticipation kindled by such a hope? In these days, when really devout and spiritual living is half scorned, can we be "steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," without the cheering of this hope? Longing to take our places among the Lord's labourers; to be co-workers together with God in His redemptive scheme, light-holders for God; Safed cities crowning hill-tops, and guiding ever pilgrim spirits home to God. Longing to be among those who would have all men know the royal claims of Him whom we call "Lord of lambs, the lowly; King of saints, the holy"; among those who would lift up the cross in sight of a dying world; how shall we renew our zeal, refuse to be weary in our well-doing, lay ever more talent, more money, more time, more prayer, upon the altar of service, save by keeping ever in view the glory of that time when the "kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ." We cannot do without these rapturous visions of the latter-day glory. The intensity, the holy passion, the consecrated zeal of a Christian life, fade out if we lose sight of that future. God has given us wonderful pictures of the scenes that are to be. Pearly gates, golden streets, waving palms, white-robed hosts; and then, reaching up beyond sensible figures into higher moral suggestions, God gives us the song of the days that are to be, when the "kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ." Perhaps *these* are the last days. The world's coronation of Jesus may be nearer than we think. And what a day that will be! What a day for toilers, and for givers, and for men of prayer! What a day for the martyrs who have died for Christ! What a day for the missionaries, who have given their lives to witnessing for Christ! What a day for those who have been looking for its appearing in the only true way of looking, by earnest and faithful discharge of present duty for Christ's sake! Sung by the chorus in the great oratorio, the words of our text have thrilled our hearts. But what shall be the chorus of the ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands? What will be the blended harmony of prophets and kings, and magi, and millions of the unlettered from east and west and north and south! Will you have a place in that great coronation of Jesus? Will you have a believer's place? Will you have a worker's place? Will you have a song of your own? Will you have a band round you of those whom you led to Christ? The day is coming. The glints of the dawning are already in the east. Soon the cry will go up, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ."

CHAPTER XII.

THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH AND ITS GREAT HINDERER.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

"In the set of visions now before us, the Apocalypse unveils the spiritual aspects of the conflict, that we may know that the issue is not between Christianity and un-Christianity alone, but between Christianity and anti-Christianity. Hitherto we have seen the more outward aspects of the great war. Now we are to see its secret, hidden, spiritual—yes, supernatural—aspects, that we may understand what immeasurably divergent and antagonistic principles are in conflict under various and specious aspects in the history of the world" (*Bishop Boyd Carpenter*).

Ver. 1. **Woman.**—Symbol of the kingdom of heaven. The Church conceived under the figure of the Virgin Mary, as mother of Messiah. **Clothed with the sun,** etc.—Compare Song of Solomon vi. 10. (*Simcox* thinks the Jewish Church, the ideal Israel, is meant.) Mystically treated, the work of the Church is to bring forth Christ to men, and never to be satisfied until Christ is formed in them. Exactly this its work is ever in the resistance of the devil, but in the assistance of God through His angels.

Ver. 3. **Red dragon.**—A half mythical kind of serpent, combining strength, subtlety, and power to inspire terror, in doing malicious and evil work. As the woman is an ideal, so is the dragon; he is the personification of the subtle evils that afflict the Church, and hinder her from carrying through her mission. **Seven heads and ten horns.**—Implying that all kinds of unsanctified power are embodied in him, and represented by him.

Ver. 4. **Drew.**—Draweth. **Stars.**—Represent leaders of men, men of prominent influence. These are led away by the subtleties of the evil power. **Stood before the woman.**—Figuring the intense keenness with which evil ever watches its opportunity. Some of the ideas here are evidently taken from the jealous schemes of Herod the Great, in connection with the infant Messiah.

Ver. 5. **Brought forth a man-child.**—Refer this both to Christ, and to the Spirit of Christ in the Church. **Caught up unto God.**—This seems to refer to the historical Christ.

Ver. 6. **Place prepared of God.**—Compare flight of Virgin Mary to Egypt, which may be the suggestion of this.

Ver. 7. **War in heaven.**—Nothing to do with Milton's fall of the angels. It is something happening since the Incarnation, and consequent upon it. **Michael.**—Dan. x. 13, 21, xii. 1. The special patron, or guardian angel, of the people of Israel. What we have here is a pictorial representation of the spiritual war actually being waged upon the earth. It is pictured in heaven in its completeness, and so we are cheered by the assurance that Michael is going to conquer. Compare the mission of pictorial prophetic anticipations in the Old Testament.

Ver. 9. **Old serpent.**—Perhaps with allusion to Gen. iii. 1. **Devil.**—Adversary. **Satan.**—Deceiver. The two words suggest the power and subtlety of evil. "Satan is thrown down from the position which he is still holding, and cast upon the earth; and he it is who, in order to avenge himself, calls forth from the depths of the seas—that is, from the midst of the nations—Antichrist—his instrument for waging a final conflict against Christ."

Ver. 12. **Woe to the inhabiters of the earth.**—*Simcox* suggests that the idea may be this: "The Incarnation, as it broke the otherwise invincible power of sin, so made sin more deadly, if it remains in spite of Christ's coming." It certainly refers to the intenser features of the conflict of the Church with evil, when evil failed to destroy the power of the Son of God, even when it secured His death. The present fight with evil is altogether more subtle and more perilous than Christ knew, or waged, while He was actually on earth.

Ver. 13. **Persecuted the woman.**—Which we have seen is the symbol of the Church in the world.

Vers. 15, 16. These figures have not been satisfactorily explained. *Bishop Boyd Carpenter*, treating the verses mystically, says: "By the flood, or river, we understand all great popular movements against Christianity: the earth swallows up all these; they diffuse themselves for a time, but mother earth absorbs them all. The eternal laws of truth and right are ultimately found stronger than all the half-truths, whole falsehoods, and selfishness, which give force to such movements."

Ver. 17. **Remnant of her seed.**—From attacking the Church as a whole, the power of evil turns more hopefully to deal with sections and individuals. Antichristianism has had its power on sects, parties, and persons, but it has failed in every attempt to ruin the one, universal, spiritual Church of Christ.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1—17.

Victory over the Dragon.—To understand this text (ver. 11), we must gain some general idea of the chapter to which it belongs. *Bishop Boyd Carpenter* is our best guide in the endeavour to find the spiritual meanings and suggestions of the book of Revelation. He points out that the book is not a continuous history, but a review of the great struggle between evil and good, made over and over again, from different points of view. The visions are in series. One set is connected with the "seals," another with the "trumpets." In this chapter a distinct set of visions is commenced. "It deals with the spiritual conditions of the great war between evil and good; it disrobes the false appearances which deceive men; it makes manifest the thoughts of men's hearts; it shows that the great war is not merely a war between evil and good, but between an evil spirit and the spirit of God, and that, therefore, the question is not only one between right and wrong *conduct*, but between true and false spiritual dispositions. Men look at the world, and they acknowledge a kind of conflict between evil and good; their sympathies are vaguely on the side of good; they admire much in Christianity; they are willing to think the martyred witnesses of the Church heroes; they think the reformers of past ages worthy of honour; they would not be averse to a Christianity without Christ, or a Christianity without spirituality. They do not realise that the war which is raging round them is not a war between men morally good and men morally bad, but between spiritual powers, and that what the gospel asks is not merely a moral life, but a life lived by faith in the Son of God, a life in which the spiritual dispositions are Godward and Christward. The Apocalypse, in this set of visions, unveils the spiritual aspect of the conflict, that we may know that the issue is not between Christianity and *un*-Christianity, but between Christianity and *anti*-Christianity." The chapter opens with the vision of "a woman clothed with the sun." It is the symbol of the bride, the Church of Christ. She is represented as suffering in child-birth. It is the symbol of the continual work of Christ's Church. That work is to bring forth Christ to men, and never to be satisfied till Christ is formed in them, until the Spirit of Christ, and the teaching of Christ, and the example of Christ, are received, loved, and obeyed, and men transformed into the same image, "even as by the Spirit of the Lord." But the work of the Church would not be unhindered. There would be constant opposition. The spiritual enemy would be ever on the watch, by subtle or by violent means destroying the likeness of Christ wherever it was seen. There appeared a dragon. "The dragon is that fabulous monster of whom ancient poets told, as large in size, coiled like a snake, blood red in colour, . . . unsatiable in voracity, and ever athirst for human blood." It is the emblem of the evil spirit, the devil, the perpetual antagonist of good, the persecutor of the Church in all ages. His many heads and horns and crowns suggest the manifold forms and phases of his malicious influence. This dragon is watching, and whenever the woman, the Church of Christ, brings forth any good, the dragon is as keen in his efforts to destroy it as Pharaoh was to kill the Hebrew male children, or Herod to slaughter the babes of Bethlehem. The vision of the man-child caught up to God reminds us that the Divine defence of all good is even more sure than the active enmity of evil. The flight of the woman brings before us the persecutions which the Church undergoes, because of her active effort to bring forth good. Then the vision changes, and we have pictured the great fight between Christ and the dragon, under the figure of Michael and his angels. This is to explain how it is the spirit of evil is so resolutely attacking the *Church*. He has attacked in vain the Church's Head and Lord. He has

been conquered. He has been driven out. The "Prince of the world came to Christ, and had nothing in Him." So, turning aside from Christ, the dragon attacks Christ's Church. But there is every hope for the Church. That victory of Christ's means this: "Now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ." The dragon may try to devour all the good brought forth by Christ's earth-bride, the Church. He will fail. The Church will overcome him, even as Christ has overcome him. The Church will overcome the dragon of each age, and of all ages, "by the blood of the Lamb," or because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of the testimony. Who is he that condemneth, when Christ hath died? What power can the accusations of the adversary have when the Lamb of God hath taken away the sin of the world? and when we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus? And their victory is, on their side, due to the firmness with which they stood to the word of their testimony, witnessing ever for Christ and truth, and not counting their lives dear unto themselves. Christ's martyrs are many more than those who die in prison, at stake, or on scaffold, for Him. "He *may* bid us die for Him; He does bid us live for Him. If we do not the one—the less—we may be quite sure that we shall never rise to the other—the higher and the more glorious." I would impress on you, therefore, that the conflict with evil is really a spiritual conflict, carried on *within* us. It is represented and illustrated by the conflict with outward evils which we see being waged in the large world-spheres. If we are Christ's, then the Christlike is being formed in us. We are bringing forth things which bear Christ's stamp. Good and right and gracious things are like our children. And just as there are perils surrounding infant life, foes and diseases watching to destroy this life, so the dragon watches every birth of goodness. We must accept the fact, but we will in no way be daunted by the fact, for we shall overcome because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of our testimony. The secrets of overcoming are our *Inner Life*, and our *Open Confession*.

I. **Our inner life.**—"Because of the blood of the Lamb." "Christ, who is our life." It is important that we notice how the child-figure is sustained. The Lamb is represented as being the Bride's husband, the Church's husband, and we are to think of His life as being in the Church's child. And it is this thought which gains expression in the figures of the text. It is quite a favourite figure with St. John, recurring again and again in his writings. That very striking sentence uttered by John the Baptist to his disciples, as he pointed to the young man, Jesus of Nazareth—"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world!"—entered into the apostle's very soul, and gave him his best thoughts concerning Christ, especially when he learned how to get at the deeper, mystical meanings of the sentence. We may accept the figure of the Lamb as suggestive of the gentle, submissive, and loving character of Christ: but we cannot be satisfied with that only; neither John the Baptist, nor John the Apostle, nor any other Jew, could keep from the figure its associations of sacrifice. A lamb to take away sin must have meant, to them, a lamb offered as a sacrifice for the removal of sin. But there are still other ideas suggested when prominence is given to the "blood of the lamb." For the "blood is the life." Blood *shed* stands for life *yielded*. This the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews states for us in a very impressive manner. "For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling them that have been defiled, sanctify unto the cleanness of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." By the expression "the eternal Spirit" we are to understand the sovereign

freeness of His own will; the voluntariness of His full self-surrender. We have, then, two supreme truths to receive. Christ's life is given to us: that is another truth, and the one we want for our text. Christ in you. Christ formed in you. This will at once suggest to us the meaning of this passage. We shall overcome that dragon who is ever ready to devour all the goodness we can bring forth by the virtue of the blood of the Lamb, the Christ-life that is in us. But have we entered into this higher apprehension of Christ, *who is our life*? The apostle Paul could say, "I live, yet not I; Christ liveth in me." That is the assurance of victory over all the forms, and all the powers, of evil.

II. **Our open confession.**—"The word of their testimony." Life only keeps healthy when it finds expression and exercise. The first suggestion of these words may be of martyrs, such as Polycarp, who, when importuned to blaspheme the name of Christ, answered, "Fourscore years have I served Him, and shall I now blaspheme my King and my Saviour?" At Eastbourne, near the pier, they show three iron stakes fixed firmly in the sand, now very old and rusty, and the one farthest out to sea very nearly rusted off. Round those stakes gathers a martyr-story. A father and mother and their little daughter, because of their religion, were tied to those stakes when the tide was out, and were told that, if they did not renounce their faith, they would be drowned by the rising tide. But they remained firm. The father, being the farthest out, was drowned first; then the mother; and then the priests gathered round the little girl, who was chained to the stake nearest the high-water mark, and told her, as the waves were dashing up around her, that if she would renounce her religion she would be saved. She said, "No, no, I will not deny my Saviour; I will die for Jesus; He died for me." That was the "word of her testimony," whereby she conquered the dragon. But much of our earth-struggle stops short of martyrdom. In firm standing by the right, in all earnest expressions of Christian energy and activity, we find our power to overcome. The "word of our testimony" may be said to include (1) our firm resolve daily renewed, and (2) our personal experience, which gives to our word the force that was in the words of the once blind man, when he said concerning his Healer, "Whether He be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." Look, then, once again at the points which have come out to view. Christ's Church is ever bringing forth goodness, as it were Child-Christs. The dragon of evil is ever on the watch to devour every Child-Christ of goodness. If we save the child it can only be by the power of the Christ-life that is in us, and by the power of the testimony for Christ that we persistently make as the natural and proper expression of the Christ-life. That life of Christ in us is the assurance of our final triumph over all evil, and in anticipation of that full victory which is certainly coming, for which we wait and for which we pray, we sing in our souls, comfort one another, and say, "Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down." "And I saw," says St. John, "an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand; and he laid hold of the dragon, the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Nature Serving Christianity.—"The earth helped the woman," who is regarded as the symbol of the Church of Christ. Nature helps Christianity in various ways. By—

I. **Its grand revelations.**—It reveals that there is—(1) God; (2) law; (3) mediation; (4) responsibility; (5) mystery.

II. **Its moral impressions.**—1. Sense

of dependence. 2. Reverence. 3. Contrition. 4. Worship.

III. **Its multiplied inventions.**—Men, by studying *nature*, have attained to the arts. There is (1) merchandise; (2) the Press; (3) painting; (4) music; (5) government.—*Dr. Thomas.*

The War in Heaven.—The appearance of Antichrist is preceded by a combat waged in heaven (perhaps in the heavenlies or the spiritual spheres) between Michael, the champion of God, the representative of monotheism—that is the meaning of his name, "who is like unto God"—and Satan, the seducer of men, who entices them into idolatry, into that worship of imaginary beings which is, at bottom, only the adoration of Satan himself, and of his angels. This combat represents the final conflict between monotheism and Paganism. Satan loses his place in the celestial spheres, from whence he had been ruling over men's hearts, and making himself worshipped as God. He is cast down to earth; that is to say, his reign in the sphere of religion comes to an end. The diabolical superstitions of Paganism disappear from human society. But a certain degree of power is still left to this enemy in the terrestrial sphere. Only he cannot exert it directly; and, just as evil spirits require the body of those who are possessed as a medium for their action, so Satan needs a man wholly given up to him, to enable him to realise the plans of vengeance which he is revolving in his heart. And the coming of the Antichrist is the means which he employs for realising this threat.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIRST BEAST.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

In this and the preceding chapter the three chief adversaries of the real kingdom of God in the world are described. The first is the dragon, or Satan. The second is the power of the world striving to withdraw our thoughts from the unseen and eternal, and to confine them to the seen and temporal. The third is the spirit of carnal religiousness, like that which so bitterly opposed Jesus in the days of His flesh, and sought to substitute its superficial and hollow forms for the depth, the sincerity, and the freedom, of a true life with God. These two last agencies always work together, and help one another against Christian truth. Nothing so welcome to the mere politicians of this world as a faithless Church which will help them to use men for their own selfish ends. Nothing so welcome to a faithless Church as the honours, the riches, and the spoils which the mere politicians of the world have to bestow. In this part of the Apocalypse, therefore, the passion of the seer burns with its intensest flame. The degenerate Church is represented under the figure of Babylon. In quick succession the contents of the bowls are poured out upon her, until she is cast, like a great mill-stone, into the sea; and company after company of those who had been enriched with the abundance of her dainties lament, with piercing cries, her disastrous and irremediable fate? (*W. Milligan, D.D.*).

Ver. 1. **Beast.**—*Stuart* says this beast rising out of the sea is a symbol of the Roman imperial and persecuting power; the beast which rises out of the earth (ver. 11) is an emblem of the domination and persecution of the Pagan priesthood, or religious power; and these two united, with Satan at their head, use all their efforts to crush the Church, wherever and whenever they can attack it. The first sentence of this verse should read, "and he" (*i.e.*, the dragon) "stood upon the sand of the sea." Two monsters, one more brutal, the other more subtle, seem to rise at his bidding. Compare Dan. vii. **Name.**—Should be "names."

Ver. 2. The special features of three wild beasts are combined, as in Dan. vii. 4. "The leopard (panther), lion, and wolf (bear), were symbols of luxuriousness, cruel ambition, and hungry and heartless avarice, which oppose men and nations when they seek the Holy Hill, where the light of God ever rests." We need not find either imperial or papal Rome in the *beast*, or the *false prophet*. The beast represents the civil power, whenever it is used for the

persecution of the Church. The second beast, or false prophet, represents the religious power whenever it is antagonistic to the spiritual life of the Church. They typify the civil and sacerdotal powers. "Antichrist represents political despotism, and the false prophet spiritual error."

Ver. 3. **Wounded to death.**—Some refer this to the death of Nero, and to a popular notion of the day that he would reappear. *Godet* says: "We see here one of the earlier forms of anti-Divine power on the earth, which, after having been put down by an act of the Divine power, reappears suddenly in the person of the Antichrist himself, in such a manner that the kingdom of the latter seems to be only the restoration of that ancient power." "The spirit of the wild beast is adored wherever worldliness prevails. There is nothing so successful as success, and the homage of men is more often paid to power than to principle."

Ver. 6. **And them.**—Omit "and." "Even them" would be better.

Ver. 7. **Overcome them.**—In the sense of crushing them, not in the sense of making them give up their allegiance to God.

Ver. 8. **Book of Life.**—Chap. xxi. 27.

Ver. 10. Read, "if any one (is) for captivity, into captivity he goeth. The patience and faith of the saints are to be shown by their submitting to death or captivity.

Ver. 11. **Another beast.**—See on ver. 1. **Like a lamb**, etc.—The idea of hypocrisy to serve base ends is suggested. He looks like Christ, and speaks like Satan.

Ver. 13. **Great wonders.**—Matt. xxiv. 24; 2 Thess. ii. 9. The figures of this and the following verses are taken from the demand to worship the image of the Emperor.

Ver. 17. **Number of his name.**—There have been hopeless disputings in the endeavour to identify this beast with a person; he really stands for a principle or polity, but the principle has been embodied and represented, over and over again, in the Christian ages. Some read six hundred and sixteen, but the number cannot be made to answer to any known name without considerable manipulation. It is enough to say that the Roman power is a supreme representation of the principle.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—18.

The Two Beasts.—The first beast is the great force of the world-power, which, in every age, has been antagonistic to the power of right. The wild beast is always the figure of the kingdoms of this world; *i.e.*, the kingdoms which are founded on passion or selfishness. The spirit of arrogant self-sufficiency characterised all the world-powers. The second beast is less monstrous in appearance. He somewhat resembles a lamb; he rises from the earth, and not from the sea; his power lies in deception (vers. 13, 14), as well as violence; he seems to possess more supernatural power; yet the whole of his work is directed to magnifying the first beast (ver. 12). Do not these features lead to the conclusion that the principles which the second wild beast supports are the same as those on which the former wild beast acted, but that he supports them with more subtlety, intelligence, and culture? He is called the False Prophet. The force and appropriateness of this designation become more apparent when we notice that the features which are assumed bear a deceptive resemblance to those of a lamb. The advancing intelligence of the world, its increase in knowledge and wisdom, the wider diffusion of culture and thought, produce a change in the general fashion of life; but the spirit which animates Society is unchanged. The second wild beast is that change which is a change of mode, but not of spirit; a change of manners, but not of heart. There is more refinement, more civilisation, more mind, but it is still the world-power which is worshipped; it is self-seeking adoration of pleasures, honours, occupations, influences, which spring from earth and end in earth—the pursuit of powers which are worldly. . . . All who use their knowledge, culture, wisdom, to teach men that there is nothing worthy of worship, save what they can see, and touch, and taste, are acting the part of the second wild beast. And, be they apostles of science, or apostles of culture, or apostles of logical immorality, or apostles of materialism, if their teaching leads men to limit their worship to the visible and tangible, they are making men worship the beast, who is the adversary of the servants of the Lamb.—*After Boyd Carpenter.*

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 18. *The Number of the Beast.*—The various attempts made in recent years to solve this famous Apocalyptic riddle seem to show that students are as far as ever from agreement. *Weyland* finds the number in the phrase, "Cæsar of the Romans," written in Hebrew characters; *Schmidt* and *Vischer* recognise it in the name "Nero," so written; *Pfleiderer*, in the phrase, "Nero Cæsar"; and *Voelter* in "Trajan Adrianus." *Erbes*, *Spitta*, and *Zahn*, who follow *Irenæus* in reading six hundred and sixteen instead of six hundred and sixty-six, identify the beast with Caligula, that is, "Gaius Cæsar"; but this result is obtained by the use of Greek, not Hebrew, letters. After eighteen centuries it is still uncertain whether any one has yet arisen with sufficient understanding to count the number of the beast.

A New Suggestion Concerning the Number.—It may seem a wild idea to make another attempt to explain the six hundred three score and six of Rev. xiii. 18; but I hope I may be read before being condemned. It seems to me, then, that *Hengstenberg* makes a very wise suggestion on the subject, but does not draw the right conclusion. "Here," he remarks, "we must not wander after our own imaginations. The seer of the Apocalypse lives entirely in Holy Scripture. On this territory, therefore, is the solution of the sacred riddle to be sought." He then goes on to find it in the name of Adonikam, whose "sons," or rather descendants, in Ezra ii. 13, are given as six hundred sixty and six in number. But may I call attention to that number in 1 Kings x. 14, where it represents the number of talents of gold which came to Solomon in one year? The luxury and extravagance thus brought in corrupted the heart of the king himself, who, considered the model of wisdom, gave way, led astray by wealth and its consequences, to wickedness and idolatry in his old age. May not the number in question there represent worldliness and covetousness, of which Christ our Lord taught us so especially to take heed and beware? Additional probability is given to this by the preceding verse, where the votaries of this are described as the worshippers of the beast and of his image.—*W. T. Lynn, B.A.*

The Number Symbolical.—I am disposed to interpret this "six hundred and sixty-six" as a symbolical number, expressing all that it is possible for human wisdom and human power, when directed by an evil spirit, to achieve, and indicating a state of marvellous earthly perfection, when the beast-power has reached its highest development, when culture, civilisation, art, song, science, and reason, have combined to produce an age so nearly resembling perfection—an age of gold, if not a golden age—that men will begin to say that faith in God is an impertinence, and the hope of a future life a libel upon the happiness of the present. Then will the world-power have reached the zenith of its influence; then will only a wisdom descended from above be able to detect the infinite difference between a world with faith and a world without faith, and the great gulf which the want of a little heaven-born love can fix between an age and an age. Some find the answer to this number in Nero Cæsar; others in the papacy.—*Commentary for English Readers, in loc.*

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VISION OF THE FAITHFUL SERVANTS OF GOD.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

THAT we may be assured of the safety of God's faithful ones, even during the time of the triumph of the beast and false prophet, we are shown the sealed ones all secure and in the charge of the Lamb; and we are further assured that seven angels are ministering to the protection and comfort of the imperilled saints. The angel of good news (vers. 6, 7); the angel proclaiming the doom of the great world city (ver. 8); the angel who warns men against the mark of the beast (vers. 9-12); the angel of comfort (ver. 13); the angel of the wheat harvest (vers. 14-16); the angel of the vintage (vers. 17-20); the angel of fire (ver. 18).

Ver. 1. **Father's name.**—Read "His name and His Father's name."

Ver. 4. **Virgins.**—The term is used figuratively, not literally. They were virgin souls who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal: and so here they were virgin souls who had refused to offer incense to the bust of the emperor.

Ver. 6. **Everlasting gospel.**—With idea of its universal applicability. Everlasting and eternal are constantly used to indicate quality.

Ver. 8. **Babylon.**—The type of all cities that stand in the pride of self-reliance, and so put dishonour upon God. "Is not this great Babylon which I have builded?" "Babylon is clearly an emblem of some principles which have been more or less accepted by all nations, and which will more or less involve all in the consequences of her fall."

Ver. 13. **Blessed are the dead.**—This relieves anxiety concerning all who are taken out of the warfare before the victory is fully won. They will share all the rewards, and their life-witness and service will be in no wise forgotten. Recall the fear with which St. Paul deals in the epistle to the Thessalonians, that those who died before Christ came would be placed under some special disadvantages.

Ver. 14. **Son of man.**—So figured as presiding over the final judgment of humanity. The visions of a harvest and a vintage (vers. 15-20), typify the time, now nigh at hand, in which God will gather in His own, and will trample His enemies in the winepress of His wrath.

Ver. 20. "The number here, four multiplied into itself, and then multiplied by a hundred is symbolical of a judgment complete and full, and reaching to all corners of the earth."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—12.

The Bible for the World's Salvation.—The portion which is most suggestive for the purposes of the preacher is that comprised in vers. 6, 7. See a first truth. It is not the Bible as a record of the gospel that saves the world. The gospel saves the world. The gospel is God saving.

I. **What is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God?**—1. Good news of God Himself. Good, because no other religion proclaims it. It is the news that God *is Love*, and that we may use the Father-name for Him, and the fatherly relations to represent Him. 2. Good news of God's gift. "Gave His only begotten Son." A man, given to men. A son, given to prodigals. We have to "believe the love God hath to us," as shown in His "unspeakable gift."

II. **Wherein lies the saving efficacy of this gospel?**—1. In its universal adaptation. It is a salvation, not for what is peculiar to some men, or some nations, under some unusual circumstances, but for the woe that is common to all men, which we put into the word "*sinners.*" Other religions are limited to particular tribes or nations. Illustrate gods of hills and gods of valleys. Distinct deities in different parts of India. 2. In the power of God that works through it. We must never separate agencies from the Divine life that is in them, and think that agencies can save. (1) The Bible cannot save. (2) The gospel cannot save. (3) Faith cannot save. God saves, through faith, by means of the gospel, which is carried to men in the Bible. 3. In the attraction of Him who is the essence of it. There must be personal soul-relations with Christ, the Living

Saviour, if there is to be salvation. And these are brought to men through the attractive power which Christ exerts when "lifted up" into their view.

III. **Where shall we find the gospel enshrined?**—In the Bible. As the Jews carried and preserved the primary truths of the unity and spirituality of God for humanity, so the Bible—the whole Bible—carries and preserves the gospel—the primary truths of Divine redemption—for humanity. The Bible is not a book of science, or of history, or of social principles; these are but its framing, and setting, and illustration. The one concern of the Bible is *Religion*. It tells us what God's relations with man have been. That is the very heart of its *history*. It tells us what man's relations with God should be, and may be. That is its *message*. It is summed up in the words, "He that hath the Son hath life." Men have done the Bible great wrong by taking it to be what it never proposed to be, and never could be. Then to scatter abroad the Bible, in every land and every tongue, is for the angel to fly abroad with the everlasting gospel. There are two ways in which the angel—as the symbol of agencies—carries the gospel. 1. *It is spoken by the servants of God.* At first the message was spoken by apostles and teachers. It was not written and collected together so as to be at the command of evangelists and missionaries, for more than two centuries. At first men were possessed with the Word, and spake what they had *in them*. And this is the deeper truth, and holier power now. The true speaker is the man who has got the Word *in him*. Send that man anywhere, and he is an angel, having the everlasting gospel. 2. *It is distributed as the book which we call the "Word of God."* And we can readily recognise the wisdom that lies in the employment of this agency. (1) Its attractiveness. (2) Its variety. Suits all ages and all abilities. (3) Its adaptation to the world, through being Eastern in form. (4) Its uniqueness, as compared with the Bibles of other religions. Compare Vedas, Koran, Book of Mormon, etc. But these two—the speakers and the Word—are really one, seeing that the speakers only speak the Word. Always the *Word* is the agency, whether it be heard from the lips or read from a book. And we must face the fact that what a sinful, dying world wants is that gospel which is in the Bible, and which may come to men either as spoken or as read. Both ways we may think of when we sing:

> "Fly abroad, thou mighty gospel,
> Win and conquer, never cease."

For the gospel does everywhere—all the world over and all the ages through—prove itself able to meet and satisfy all kinds of spiritual needs that humanity can feel.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 1. *Marks of Servitude.*—It was a custom among the ancients for servants to receive the mark of their master, and soldiers of their general, and those who were devoted to any particular idol, the mark of that particular idol. These marks were usually impressed on their right hands, or on their foreheads (Rev. xiii. and xvi.), and consisted of some hieroglyphical character, or of the name expressed in vulgar letters, or in numerical characters. Gal. vi. 17: "The marks of the Lord Jesus." What these marks were, the apostle explains by the stripes, etc., mentioned in 2 Cor. xi. 23. There is a beautiful allusion to the stigmata—marks which were sometimes fixed on servants and soldiers, to show to whom they belonged. How strikingly do these two remarks illustrate the scene of Jesus the Lamb of God, the all-conquering Redeemer, standing as the great Captain of Salvation at the head of His brave army of saints on Mount Sion! "I

looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with Him an hundred forty and four thousand, having His Father's name written in their foreheads."

Ver. 6. *The Gospel of Retribution.*—That a Divine judgment impends over all the actions and generations of men; that the hour of judgment is sure to strike at the due moment, let men play what tricks they will with the hands of the clock, and sure to be heard over all the world, let men close their ears as they will; that this fact of impending and inevitable judgment is an eternal or *œonial* gospel, veritable good tidings of great joy to every nation and tribe, tongue and people;—all this is at once of supreme importance and supreme interest. A gospel for all men in all ages must be a gospel for us. A gospel weighted by no miracles and no dogmas, a gospel which is open to no question and no doubt, but is felt to be true always, and everywhere, and by all. What, then, is this gospel? It is the gospel of retribution. We are to fear and glorify God because the hour of His judgment is come. This is the truth which the angel, flying in mid-heaven, between God and man, proclaims to-day, and always has proclaimed, and always will proclaim. This is the truth which St. John calls "an eternal gospel"—not *the* gospel, and still less the *only* gospel, but still a veritable gospel, glad tidings of great joy, to us and to all mankind. If the *law* of retribution is familiar to you, is it nothing to you to be assured, and assured on the highest authority, that what you admit to be a law is also a *gospel*? When we are told that God's judgments on sin are an eternal gospel, a gospel for all beings in all ages, what is implied? *This* is implied, and there is no truth more precious and more practical: that the judgments of God are corrective, disciplinary, redemptive; that they are designed to turn us away from the sins by which they are provoked; that the message they bring us, and bring from heaven is: "Cease to do evil; learn to do well.—*S. Cox, D.D.*

The Everlasting Gospel.—Only one gospel is everlasting, which can pass from country to country, from continent to continent, and be at home everywhere; which time cannot wither nor custom stale; which has the safe and certain reversion of all the future. Why is this? What makes the gospel of Christ everlasting?

I. **It is a message to what is universal in man.**—Religions have been the religions of single tribes, or single countries, and have not been adapted for other parts of the world. But the glory of Christianity is that its teaching is addressed to what is most characteristic in human nature, and absolutely the same in all members of the human race, whether they be rich or poor, whether they inhabit one hemisphere or the other, and whether they live in ancient or modern times. You have only to glance at the most outstanding words of the gospel to see this. *E.g.*, 1. The *word* "*soul.*" Jesus went down to the child, the beggar, the harlot, the weakest and most despised members of the human family, and when He was able to find, even in them, this infinitely precious thing, it was manifest that He had discovered the secret of a universal religion. 2. *The word* "*sin.*" Speak to the conscience, and every human being feels that He is the man. 3. *The word* "*eternity.*" "God hath put eternity in their heart." When the hand of the gospel touches this string of the harp of human nature, it responds. On this preaching the union of Christians must be realised.

II. **It is a message to what is peculiar in man.**—It can meet, as they rise, the changing conditions of society; it has an inexhaustible facility of adaptation to the wants and the circumstances of every individual whom it addresses. Some "preach to the times," others "preach for eternity." The two things are not inconsistent.

His gospel has a word in season for every condition of life—for the little child, the young man in his prime, and for old age; a word for the multitude, and for the few. We have not exhausted Christ, and we have not exhausted the gospel of Christ. The pulpit is too far away from the individual. We must come nearer to men, and acquaint ourselves with the details of their experience. Sympathy is the key which opens the heart. Professional authentication sometimes only creates obstacles; but all difficulties melt away before the force of love.—*James Stalker, D.D.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13—16.

Ver. 13. *The Harvest of the Earth for Keeping.*—This is the link between the earlier and later visions of this chapter. Many of the Lord's redeemed ones had already been gathered in, out of their earth-persecutions. Many were still left under the fiery trial. But they were keeping steadfast and faithful, while the gospel was being proclaimed unto "every nation and tribe and tongue and people." They are to be cheered and encouraged by the vision of the hour when the angel may declare that the earth-story is complete, and the judgment of God has come. In that day evil, however mighty it may seem to have grown, will fall, suddenly, irretrievably, even as Babylon fell in the day of its pride. In that day the patience of the saints will gain its full recognition. The Divine acceptance comes to the "sheep of the right hand," "they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." But this final day of God's judgment is no present thing; it is a vision of the far-away. It may even be turned wrongly, and made a discouragement to Christian souls, for it may seem as if all the blessedness of that day were reserved for those saints who were alive when the great judgment-trumpet should be sounded. The writer checks himself to say a gracious and comforting word to those who might be troubled with such thoughts and fears. The harvest of the earth is a long-continued process. The angel of the harvest is the death-angel, as well as the angel of ingathering for those who are "alive and remain at the coming." Therefore this comforting word may be spoken—nay, write it down, for it is certain; write it down, for the saints of all the ages will want the gracious assurance. Not only blessed are the dead which have died in the Lord, whom you have seen in vision harping in the glory, and singing their new song, but blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth, from this very hour right away to the judgment day. "Yea, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." They are all stored safe in the garner of God, until the harvest of the earth is complete. Then, having given this comforting assurance, the writer can return upon his visions of the end of all earthly things—his visions of the harvest-day of God. It must prove to be a double harvest. Christ Himself will see to the ingathering of the saints. His angels will execute His will upon those who have refused His gospel, kept their sin, and worked against all the gracious purposes of His love.

I. **The first-fruits of God's harvest of the earth.**—"The dead which die in the Lord." We may think of heaven as the great storehouse, granary, of God. His harvest is the harvesting of years. His grain ripens in all the ages. The reaper we call death cuts down the golden grain; but no stalk is lost—every one is borne into the garner, and safely treasured there until the harvest work is complete. It is but a resting time for the saints; they never pass out of God's memory and regard. "Their works do follow them," and all will be taken into due account in the great day of Divine appraisement. It is a most helpful way in which to think of our dead, and of our own dying. They are but first-fruits of harvest, carried in early to God's barn. They are only waiting awhile, until the day when the earth-fields can be swept once for all, and God's harvest of the earth be complete.

II. **The remainder of God's harvest of the earth.**—A day must come when the arresting hand must be placed on the earth's story, the stalks may no longer stand in the earth-fields. All must be gathered in. That is presented in symbol in the visions of the angel offering the sickle to the Son of man, reminding Him that the harvest is almost over-ripe, and must at once be reaped. Of this we are assured: the succession of the dying will not be continuous. The number of Christ's redeemed ones will one day be completed. And what He will do for them in the great forever they shall know when the last stalk has fallen before the reaper.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 13. *The Blessedness of the Dead.*—What this text means in its fulness of application no one now knows. But its suggestions are manifest and manifold.

I. **God's saints, at death, enter into rest.**—Rest—not, indeed, from service, but from *labour*—which implies the disagreeable, exhausting, discouraging side of toil. In the higher sense of service they rest not day nor night, serving God in His temple. But the hindrances without and within all cease, and the service is unmixed delight.

II. **Their works do follow them.**—This, in a threefold sense, is true: 1. Follow them in witnessing to their fidelity. 2. Follow them in contributing to their reward. 3. Follow them in perpetuating their influence for good.—*Anon.*

Dying in the Lord.

I. **What is it to die in the Lord?**—One has said that it "implies a previous living with Him." Living with Him involves the exercise of certain elements. These are found in ver. 12. 1. Faith: "The faith of Jesus." No man can live with or die in the Lord without *faith* in Him. With it he can *live* and *die* triumphantly. 2. Obedience: "They that keep the commandments of God." Living with God is obeying God. The obedience of faith—the obedience that is vitally connected with faith—enters into the preparation for a happy death, or death in the Lord.

II. **Why are those who die in the Lord blessed or happy?**—1. The happiness of contemplation. The Christian has a bright prospect. He can look forward, not to a dark uncertainty, but to the pleasures of home. When dying, one said, "I wish I had the power of writing or speaking, for then I would describe to you how pleasant a thing it is to die." Another, "I have experienced more happiness in dying two hours this day than in my whole life." 2. The happiness of release from toil, sorrow, pain. Rest—"That they may *rest* from their *labours*." Christians are not free from trials; it is not according to the Divine plan that they should be. But those trials cannot pass beyond the gate of death; and when the Christian passes into the beyond he leaves his trials. 3. The happiness of being with Christ after death. The psalmist said, "In Thy *presence* is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Again, "I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness." Paul said, "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." Great joy here, but *fulness* of joy with Christ.—*Anon.*

"*The Blessed Dead.*"—No book is fuller than this Apocalypse of the struggles and victories of the Church on earth; but it also opens a door into heaven. It shows that heaven is not all future, but, as it were, contemporary with present history, and bound to it by the closest ties. Messengers pass and repass; tidings come and go; and the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne presides alike over time and eternity.

I. **The answer which the text gives to the question, How is the heavenly blessedness attested?**—We all profess

to believe in the reality of heaven; but why? 1. *There is the evidence from miracle, or the presence of the supernatural in the form of power.* This great apostle heard a voice from heaven. But before this, John had looked on One whose life was crowded with miracle. He had witnessed His risen glory as He came back from heaven, and His ascension glory as He returned to heaven. If miracle could vouch for heaven, its existence was confirmed. 2. *The testimony is, in itself, Divinely credible.* Its internal character vouches for its authority. 3. *There is a living and experimental evidence of the reality of heaven.* It is written in living epistles, written, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the Living God.

II. **How is the heavenly blessedness secured?**—1. *The doctrine here is that the title to heaven depends on faith* "in the Lord." 2. *But there is also a preparation for the heavenly state by holy obedience.* "They rest from their labours," implying that they prove their faith by works.

III. **How is the heavenly blessedness enjoyed?**—1. *Heaven is the rest of the worker.* It is not sloth, torpor, or inactivity; but while there is no apathy there is rest to the body and the spirit. No more out in the billows, toiling in rowing, when the wind is contrary, but in smooth water, and with the ripple breaking on the shore. 2. *Heaven is the continued influence of the work.* "Their works do follow them." Every moral act, truly good, will last for ever. The simplest act of self-denial for Christ's sake, the mother's faintest prayer, record themselves in the sounding-board of eternity, and never die away.—*John Cairns, D.D.*

Ver. 15. *The Harvest of the Earth.*—The expression is a singular and, indeed, a striking one. As his fields are to the farmer, so, we are permitted to think, the whole earth is to God. The farmer works for a harvest of his fields and trees, and God may be thought of as working for the harvest of the whole earth. God's work in the world is like ploughing, sowing, weeding the fields. God's work has its reward when He carries home the last loaded wain, and His garner is filled with the good corn of the earth of humanity. Can we follow out the figure, and find in it the suggestion of helpful truths?

I. **God prepared the earth for His seeding.**—Scientific men may wrangle over the ages and order of creation. It is enough for us to know that, at a given time, God had prepared the earth to be the scene of a moral trial for a new race of beings. It is full of interest to inquire into all the mystery of nature. Of its study man never tires. But it is of far greater interest to observe in how marvellous a way the earth was adjusted and adapted to the beings who were to be placed upon it. The relativity of creation to a being with five senses, and these particular five senses, has never yet been shown with the precision and fulness that it demands. The farmer cleans, and ploughs, and manures, and harrows, and ridges, his fields, in precise adaptation to the crop that he intends to grow upon it; and earth is the prepared field of God, made ready for His sowing.

II. **God seeds His prepared earth with men.**—Scattering the seed all over the earth, that man's probation may be carried on under every varying condition of soil, and landscape, and climate, and relationship. God keeps on seeding the earth with men; every seed with a great possibility in it; every seed set where its possibility may freely unfold, and where the God-provided influences all tend to the nourishment of all its best possibilities. Men, men everywhere, are the seed of God. They are quick with Divine life, and sown in the earth to grow into a harvest for God.

III. **The harvest God seeks from His seeding is character.**—God sows His earth with moral beings, in the hope of reaping moral character. But what is moral character? It is the proper fruitage of the earth-experience of moral beings. But can we understand it a little more fully

than that? A moral being is one that *can* recognise a distinction between good and evil, and, when the distinction is seen, *can* choose for itself which it will have, the good or the evil. But a moral being must be put into such circumstances as will offer it the choice between good and evil. And substantially the test amounts to this: good is doing what is known to be the will of the Creator; evil is doing the will of the moral being himself, when that is known to be *not* the will of the Creator. The picture-scene in the Garden of Eden is the typical trial of moral beings. But what we need, for our present purpose, to see with clearness, is that when, under enticement of the senses, the moral being has chosen the evil, he is said to have fallen, but he has really started the possibility of moral character, which is the issue of the conflict in which the will, biassed by the indulgence of the senses, is brought back to the choice and obedience of God's will, and recovered from all the sad experiences and conditions resulting from the choice of evil. The story of a life is the story of that conflict. It is the growth, through the long months, of God's seed into the "full corn in the ear" of established moral character. It is the unfolding of what God would gather in from His seeding of men, the righteousness of the accepted will of God. One thing only does man take through the great gates—the character that he has gained. It is the full ear that heads the stalk, and ripens for the reaper.

IV. **God has anxious times while His seed of men is growing into His harvest of character.**—Every blade that breaks the earth in the farmer's field has to fight for its life with varied foes: insects, worms, mildew, rust, living creatures, varying temperatures, crowding weeds; the growth of every blade to stalk and ear is a hard-won victory. The stalk can do its best, and be its best, only at the cost of unceasing struggle and watchfulness. And the field of earth is but a type of the world of men. Every character is the product of a stern experience, the issue of a hundred fights; a triumph from an unceasing struggle. Think of each man's life-story, and this is true. Think of the histories of nations, and this is true. Think of the story of humanity as if it were the story of one man, and it is God's Adam, planted in God's earth, and growing amid the thousandfold influences for good and evil, through all the long ages, and showing at last the golden grain of moral character, rich and ripe, that can be gathered into God's garner, as the glorious reward of His toil. For over every phase and feature of the struggle in every man out of which character is born, God presides. The problem of each man's dealings with his surroundings—helpful be they, or injurious—God is intensely interested in. He is anxious as the farmer is anxious over his growing blades. He is anxious as the parent is anxious over the unfolding of character in his child. He may let the struggle alone. He may interfere. But we may be sure that He is deeply concerned. We speak of the "making of a man," or the "making of a nation." The one thing of profoundest interest to God is the making of characters in His great earth-fields. Be it so; then a fact of infinite sadness has to be faced. The issue is disappointing, for *God's harvest-hope of reaping character from His sowing of men is only partially fulfilled.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 17—20.

The Harvest of the Earth for Crushing.—The harvest of the earth is not only the ingathering of the saints. It includes the ingathering of those whose earth-lives have been a failure: who have died in their sin; who stand on the earth, in the great reaping day, in their sin. The farmer of the yearly harvest gathers in much besides *good* wheat: wheat that has gone bad, weeds, and chaff even, with the

good wheat. If there is a barn for the good wheat, there is a fire in the field for burning up the bad, the mock wheat, the tares, and the weeds. And this seems to have suggested to the writer his vision of the other side of the last great harvest scene. But, in accordance with the symbolic ideas of the times, he takes the yield of the vines to represent the evil side of earth's harvest. It is a simple and natural symbol. The corn of the fields is the source of renewed life and health: it is the fitting symbol of the good results of earth's endeavour. The fruits of the vine have been, in all ages, since Noah stepped forth upon the cleansed earth, the fruitful source of vice, and self-indulgence, and misery, to men. So the clusters of the vine are represented as cast into the winepress, and trodden under foot; crushed down; made by stern discipline to become something other than they are. The men who have come through their earth story self-indulgent, defiant of God, and refusers of His holy gospel, must be gathered in with the stern sickle of the angel, cast like grape-clusters into the great winepress of the wrath of God. What can there be for them in that great day but "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil?"

I. **They who die in their sins are kept for their judgment.**—In the indulging of the larger hope that one day all men will be saved, it is forgotten that, through the long ages, men have died in their sins. There is a fact which must be taken into full account. Thousands of completed earth-lives have proved moral failures. Thousands of men now exist somewhere who resisted every good influence, lived without God and without hope in the world, and died in defiant rebellion against the God who made them and the Saviour who redeemed them; crimson-stained in their souls with all the pollutions of earth. They must be in keeping against their judgment day, as truly as the blessed dead are in keeping for their reward. Do we not needlessly confuse ourselves, by regarding the earth-trial of humanity as a perfect and final trial? We expect the results to be perfect, and then set ourselves to invent theories concerning the future, which can have no value, because they have no foundation. We want the issue to be that everybody comes out righteous at last; and Scripture gives no ground whatever for such an interpretation. Our Lord's parable of the tares should destroy any such ideas once for all. What we need to see is that man is a limited and imperfect being, placed in limited and imperfect circumstances; subjected to a limited and imperfect trial; and the issues will bear the character of the probation, and will include both failure and success. It is not, indeed, a question of *it will. It does.* Men do come through the probation of the earth-life evil still—worse evil for the misused probation. There must be a judgment day which they are awaiting, when the Divine dealing with their failure must be made known to them and to all; and God must be clearly seen to stand for ever for the right and against the wrong. He must do something with the vintage, as well as with the grain, of the harvest of the earth. What He will do no man knows, or can know. If the discipline of the earth-life has failed to accomplish its due result, they must go into the great winepress of the wrath of God, which must be punishment, need not be destruction, and may be the sterner, harder discipline in new and other spheres.

II. **They who stand in their sins are ready for their judgment.**—The vision seems to deal with those who are "alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord"; but, by reason of their self-willedness and rebellion, have no interest in, only the dread of, that coming. They are represented by the hanging clusters of over-ripe grapes; their cup of iniquity is full. The angel is bidden, Send forth thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. Then the number of the wicked, the number of life-failures, will be complete, as the number of the saints—the life-successes, will be complete;

and the story of the earth may be wound up. Can we find more fitting words in which to express the result of it all, so far as that result can come into human ken, than the solemn words of our Divine Lord, "And these shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life"? Can we do any more than wonder, with a great wondering, what can be the lot of the wicked, when that lot is figured so impressively as in this passage: "And the angel cast his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and cast it into the winepress, the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and there came out blood from the winepress, even unto the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand and six hundred furlongs"? Whether, then, we die in our sins, or stand in our sins when God's harvest-day dawns, there is no escaping the just and fiery indignation. That day will overtake some as a thief. "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

"Then, O my Lord, prepare
My soul for that great day.
O wash me in Thy precious blood,
And take my sins away."

CHAPTER XV.

THE ANGELS OF THE SEVEN VIALS.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

THE pledges and tokens of Divine retribution being thus given, the execution of it is speedily to begin. Seven angels are commissioned to go and inflict upon the beast and his coadjutors the seven last plagues, so called because the wrath of God is accomplished by them.

Ver. 1.—No sooner is this command given than the glorious host of martyrs around the throne of God, whose blood had been shed by the beast, sing the song of anticipative triumph, and praise the justice of God, as about to be displayed in the overthrow of the beast. The temple in heaven is then opened, and the seven angels, charged with the execution of Divine justice, go forth from it in splendid apparel. One of the four living creatures which support the throne of God gives each of them a vial, or cruse (bowl), filled with material to execute the wrath of God. The temple is immediately filled with smoke, rising from the fire which burns fiercely round the Almighty, as the emblem of His anger (Ps. xviii. 8), and also of His power to destroy. By reason of this, no one is able to enter into the temple, and, of course, no one is permitted to intercede for those who are about to be punished. Punishment, therefore, is certain and inevitable (*Moses Stuart*).

Ver. 2. **Sea of glass.**—(See chap. iv. 6). **Gotten the victory.**—R.V. "come victorious from." Omit "and over his mark."

Ver. 3. **Moses . . . Lamb.**—Types of material and spiritual redemption. **Of saints.**—Should read either "of the nations" or "of the ages."

Ver. 6. **White.**—Or bright.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—8.

Final Judgments.—The vision which perhaps, under all circumstances, most nearly corresponds with the present is that of Isaiah (chap. vi.). There the prophet beheld the vision of God. His train filled the temple, and the house was filled with smoke, and a message of judgment was given to the prophet. That message declared that the sin of the people had reached a climax; they had trifled with convictions, and henceforward the words of God's servants would harden rather than awaken them—"make the heart of this people fat, and

make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes," etc. (Isa. vi. 9, 10), till the desolating judgments had fallen. The general drift of the present vision is similar: the days of warning are over; the plagues which now fall will fall on those who have trifled with convictions; the sanctuary, which was opened as a refuge, is now closed; none can enter till the plagues have descended. The time has come when the judgments of God fail to stir the conscience which has been deadened by sin; the day when the gracious influences towards repentance were felt has passed. The word that has been spoken is about to descend in judgment (John vii. 48).

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 3. *The Song of Moses and the Lamb.*—God's world, God's Word, and God's people, are all full of song. In God's world there is nothing, animate or inanimate, without the capacity of making sound. The very flints have music in them. "There's music in the sighing of a reed; there's music in the gushing of a rill." In God's Word we are told that at the creation "the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy." Moses uttered the deliverance of his people in song, saying, "I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." Deborah taught the people a song, whereby they might praise the Lord for the avenging of Israel. When the new creation dawned, in the birth of Jesus, angels broke through the veil, and were seen and heard by our fellow-men, singing together, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill to men." David's life was a song. When Paul and Silas lay chained in the dungeon, they sang praises in the night. The visions of heaven assure us that the ransomed ones are full of song. Our text gives us the theme of their song: "Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints." Why so much singing? Why a world full of it, a Bible full of it, a heaven full of it? Because there is nothing but music that can find expression for the deepest, the most thrilling, emotions of our nature. So often our feeling is too deep for words, the force of passion strikes us, and keeps us, dumb. Sometimes feeling is too deep for looks—nay, even for tears; it seems to dry up the very fountain of tears. But the man who can find no words has often learned that the tongue of the dumb can sing.

> "Music! Oh, how faint and weak
> Language fades before thy spell!
> Why should feeling ever speak,
> When thou canst breathe its soul so well?"

I. Who are these heaven-singers?—Answering that question in the language of symbols this book of Revelation tells us: "I saw as it were a sea of glass, mingled with fire; and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having the harps of God." "Lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands." These rejoicing ones were once sinners of this our earth. They are no company of unfallen angels, whose songs could have no thrilling tones, that tell of sad memories. The song the ransomed sing is a song that only sinners can sing, as the name upon their foreheads is a name that only redeemed sinners can wear. Every bird that flies through God's sunshine—thrush, and robin, and linnet, and nightingale—has his own note, which none but he can sing. Every intelligent creature, every son of God, has his own book of psalms. And there is a style, a tone, an inimitable pathos about a *sinner's* song that will make his voice for ever

distinct among the eternal harmonies. And it is pleasant to think that these heavenly singers have been gathered out of all ages and out of all nations. However the forms of music may vary in different periods and different climes, it will be found at last that when the *hearts* of men sing they make but one chorus. Black and white, bond and free, Jew and Gentile, sing in harmony together the "song of Moses and the Lamb." If we inquire, What *are* these sinners now? the answer comes, The redeemed of the Lord; the purchase of the Saviour's blood. Monuments of the grace of the Holy Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Ransomed for ever. Sinners who once were *justified* through faith in the Lord Jesus; who long were being *sanctified* in the power of the Holy Ghost; and who now are glorified, with something of the glory that Jesus had with the Father before the world was. The work now being carried on in us, in them is finished. While it is being wrought we can sometimes sing, but oftener we must weep; when it is finished we shall weep no more. All tears are wiped away. If we can inquire, *Where* do these singers stand? the answer cannot be given except by symbol; for of the realities of heaven no man knoweth, no man can know, until the mortal has given place to the immortal, and the eyes of the earthly have changed for the eyes of the heavenly. They stand "on a sea of glass, mingled with fire"; perhaps we should understand, "on the shores of a sea of glass, mingled with fire." The image is suggested by the thought of the Israelites passing through the Red Sea. For them all its waves were stilled; a sea of glass lay on either side their God-made road. And when the evening shadows lengthened and the "cloudy pillar" changed to fire, it flushed all that glassy sea and made it appear as a "sea of glass, mingled with fire." The symbol seems to suggest their possession of rest and their memory of conflict. The restless sea, always rising and falling, often desolating and ruinous, is the Bible emblem of the troubles, and anxieties, and sorrows, of the earth. Man is born to trouble. But yonder is the sea of glass. The waves are stilled now. The "weary are at rest." The cloud-flecked sky can find only a broken image of its beauty in the waving sea; and God finds only partial and broken images of Himself in the restless, anxious lives we have to live. A whole firmament of glory shall shine out of a still sea of glass; and a whole image of God may beam forth from that life we shall live in the land of heavenly rest. But memory will mingle the glassy sea with fire. As the sea is the emblem of *trouble*, so fire is the emblem of *conflict*. The shores of the glassy sea are only won through a great fight of affliction by him who is girded with the whole armour of God. In many an earthly mansion the shields, and breast-plates, and helmets, and swords, are hung up in the great halls, to remind the peaceful sons of the old battles out of which their forefathers wrung their liberty and rest. Who knows? There may be, somewhere in God's heaven, an armoury where every new soldier that has battled through may lay up his weapons and his armour. Certainly fire memories shall mingle with the eternal rest; memories of the fires of battles with sin, and memories of the refining fires of God's chastisements. And home will be to us the sweeter for nights tented in the strangers' ground, and bivouac amid the storm and the cold—months beleaguered by watchful foes, and battles fought hardly for holiness and God.

II. **What are the singers' songs?**—Evidently their hymn is a blending of their old earth-song with a new heaven-song. Not, indeed, so altogether new and different. We, too, can sing, even here, the Song of Moses and the Lamb; but not just as they sing it. We can only put as much meaning into our singing as we have had experience to prepare us for. They have an experience which cannot be ours as yet—an experience of victory, and victory's

reward; so they can sing with meanings which we cannot reach. Their song is our song, with more soul in it. The subject of their song is not *redemption alone*, but God's entire dealings with man in revelation. It is not the song of the Lamb only. It is the song of Moses, too. Redemption is, indeed, the one word that expresses all God's dealing with the race. His one work has always been the work of recovery—recovery of men, of families, of nations, from outward and bodily evils, from mental mistakes, from moral bondages. Ever since Eden God has been delivering, rescuing, and saving man, and His whole work seems to reach its climax in the deliverance and redemption of human spirits from the yoke and thraldom of sin by Christ Jesus. We lose much by separating the work of God on our race into *parts*. It is really one sublime, one perfect whole. Some gifts of His, like acts of His, seem, indeed, to rise up into view, mountain-like, and demand unusual attention; but from Eden to the judgment day there has been one purpose, never forgotten, never remitted, never undervalued: it is the world's full redemption from sin. We may not think of our God resting in eternal peace until every foe of man is slain, suffering and crime are ended, Satan is bound, and death, the last enemy, shall die. One day a saved earth will sing, "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth." For the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. The models of this entire deliverance are "Moses" and "the Lamb." Moses representing God's triumph over evil in its *outward* manifestations, and the Lamb representing God's triumph over evil in its *inward* manifestations. Moses' triumph at the passing of the sea I need but recall to mind; it said for all the ages that "nothing is too hard for the Lord," and no outward troubles need overwhelm us. The "Song of the Lamb" reminds us that God has triumphed, and is triumphing, over inward evil. It is the most mournful part of the work of sin that it has defiled human souls, and blurred the image of God on them. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, is the Divine deliverer from inward sin, from soul-sin. No fetters of national slavery dropped from aching wrists when Jesus died, the sacrifice and ransom price. No Roman armies, panic-stricken, fled from Palestine when He died, the nation's champion. No royal proclamation flung open prison doors when He took the sinner's place. No waving flags, no enthusiastic shouts, proclaimed a nation's resurrection when He died on Calvary. But then the "prince of this world was judged, and cast out." Then "Satan fell like lightning from heaven." Then captive *souls* were set free. Then the gospel of God's saving love was proclaimed to the poor. Then the heaven of holiness for sinners came within their reach. Well may we anticipate the heavenly song, and join now the chorus of the white-robed host, saying, "Thou hast redeemed us unto God by Thy blood, and hast made us kings and priests unto God."

The Divine Righteousness.—Good men, in all ages, have been deeply impressed with the Divine righteousness. They have ever conceived of their salvation as exhibiting and establishing the Divine righteousness. It is not proper to speak of justice or righteousness as being *satisfied*. The Bible speaks of it as *revealed*, *manifested*. Righteousness can be satisfied with nothing short of the *rightness of* those in whom it is interested. Men mistake the Divine by treating justice as some abstract quality: it is one of the living forces of a Living Being; it is an expression of the Divine will. The revelation of God is this: "A just God *and* a Saviour." A just God is proved by, illustrated by, His becoming a Saviour.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SEVEN VIALS, OR BOWLS.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

"THIS chapter describes the pouring out of the seven vials—that is to say, the extremest punishments of God—upon the throne and empire of the beast. Antichrist had promised to mankind a new, golden age under his rule; but he promised without God. Christ now wields His own sceptre, and smites with repeated blows the nations who have been led astray. It is the history of the plagues of Egypt over again. A noisome sore consumes the flesh of the subjects of the beast (first vial). The waters of the sea are corrupted, and all the inhabitants of the ocean perish (second vial, an aggravation of the second trumpet). A similar judgment smites the rivers and fountains of waters (third vial; compare the third trumpet). A burning sun scorches the inhabitants of the earth (fourth vial). These four vials constitute a first series of plagues, after which the author remarks that men only blasphemed with so much greater audacity the name of the God who had sent these plagues upon them. A thick darkness comes upon the kingdom of the beast, as before upon the kingdom of Egypt (fifth vial); men gnaw their tongues in their rage, rather than confess their faults. The Euphrates is dried up, to open the way for a new invasion of the Eastern nations, whom three unclean spirits summon to the last battle against the Eternal (sixth vial; compare the invasion described under the sixth trumpet). Lastly, an earthquake of unprecedented violence falls upon Babylon, the capital of the beast, and the other cities of that empire (seventh vial; compare the similar phenomenon described under the sixth seal) (*Godet*).

Ver. 12. **Euphrates.**—Here symbolical, as the natural barrier which checked the onflow of Eastern armies.

Ver. 16. **Armageddon.**—The mountain of Megiddo, the great battle-field of the Holy Land. The old battle-ground becomes the symbol of a decisive struggle. No material battle is meant; the final struggle is one of principles.

CHAPTERS XVII.

THE JUDGMENT ON BABYLON.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

NOTICE that in the Old Testament, harlotry is the frequent representation of apostasy. Babylon stands for the Apostate Church, which is here figured as a harlot temptress.

Ver. 4. **Golden cup.**—Jer. li. 7.

Ver. 5. **Upon her forehead was a name.**—It is said to have been an ancient custom for harlots to wear their names on their foreheads—tied on as a label. **Mystery.**—See 2 Thess. ii 7.

Ver. 7. **Carrieth her.**—The woman sitting upon the beast may mean the union of the ecclesiastical and secular power. [It is not in the design of this commentary to examine how far the events of St. John's time, more especially in relation to the persecutions of Imperial Rome, and in relation to doctrinal and moral failures within the Church of Christ, give colour and form to his symbolical representations. It is hardly possible to make any elaborate homiletical use of this portion of the Apocalypse.] Into the controversy as to the relation of ecclesiastical Rome to these Johannine visions and prophecies, it is not either fitting or necessary that this work should enter. It has been the aim of its author and editor carefully to avoid all contentious topics, and keep entirely in the realm of general truths and principles. What wise uses may be made of single passages in these chapters will be found indicated in the homiletic portions, and in the notes and specimen outlines.

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 3. *The Scarlet Harlot.*—Who or what is the Scarlet Harlot of Rev. xvii.? Commentators have given scores of opinions, but the majority have settled upon Rome, either Pagan or papal. "That great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth" (ver. 18) to their minds determines the question, and as a collateral proof is the plain declaration (ver. 9) that "the seven heads are the seven mountains on which the woman sitteth." What can these be (they say) but the famous seven hills of Rome? These interpreters find no difficulty in exalting the petty hills of Rome into mountains, and they also fail to see that these seven mountains are (in ver. 3) "a scarlet coloured beast," and (in vers. 1, 15) "many waters." How are they going to turn the seven hills of Rome into "many waters," or "a beast"? The harlot sits on all three equally. The error with most commentators in this remarkable book is their strange mingling of the literal with the symbolic. It is true that when the apostle-prophet himself explains a symbol, we have a literal statement, as in chap. xix. 8. "The fine linen is the righteousness of saints," but in all other cases the symbolism must be adhered to. In this seventeenth chapter we see a scarlet harlot, seated on a scarlet beast, and the beast is full of names of blasphemy, and has seven heads and ten horns. The woman is gorgeously arrayed and is drunk—drunk with the blood of the saints. The beast and the horns (see R.V.) at last destroy the harlot (ver. 16). Now, if the woman of chap. xii., clothed with the sun, and yet bitterly persecuted, is God's true Church, as the whole context seems to demand, what is more likely than that this prosperous harlot is the false church? But what is the false Church? The Church of Rome? But how about the Greek Church? and the Armenian Church? and the Nestorian Church? and the Abyssinian Church? Are not these as false as Rome? I think we shall have to give up the identification of this woman with the Church of Rome. She is the *false* Church—any Church which puts aught in Christ's place. In other words, she is the ecclesiastical corrupter of doctrine and practice found in all so-called churches of Christ. Christ has a real, true Church, composed of sincere believers, trusting in Him alone as the Saviour; and side by side with these, under the same external organisations, are thousands and millions who are a false Church, whose faith is in human power and human works, who pervert the truth, and whose lives are not spiritual, but carnal. These form Antichrist. They are not under any one organisation. They are under all nominally Christian organisations. This is the false Church. Do not look for either this or the true Church in one external form. Look for it in life and spirit. This is the scarlet harlot. It seeks this world's gold and precious stones and pearls (ver. 4), and has no eye for eternal realities. It has always been the oppressor of God's true people, and the suppressor of God's truth. It is the concreted spirit of persecution toward all that is godly. It is a Christianity that practically denies Christ, and puts human greed or human pride and pleasure in His place. It exhibits itself, not only in superstition, political power, the Inquisition and Jesuitism, but also in rationalism, scepticism and worldliness. This woman—this harlot—this false Church, is called "that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth," because it is this false style of Christianity that controls the governments of the world, which support the Church as it does the theatre, and which sings *Te Deums* over acts of tyranny and murder. This great city is called Babylon (ver. 5), and Sodom, and Egypt, and Jerusalem, which crucified our Lord

(chap. xi. 8), names indicative of hatred to God's people and to their Lord and Redeemer. The waters on which the woman sits, we are told, are the nations of the earth (ver. 15), for she proudly flourishes wherever the nominal Christian Church is found. These nations in their institutions support her. The *waters* and *mountains* also appear as a *beast*, the beast of chap. xiii., the beast of human tyrannical power, selfish and cruel. This human power has had seven grand manifestations in history as connected with God's people—namely, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome Pagan, Rome Christian. The first five of these had fallen in the prophet-apostle's time (ver. 10); the sixth was in existence; the seventh was still to come, but to continue only a brief period, for the beast itself has to succeed his heads and share his power with the ten horns. That is, the successors of the Roman Empire should unite with the tyranny, now not in an Empire, but in an ecclesiastical human centre. On all these phases of tyranny over man, the scarlet woman sits in her gorgeous pride. Ecclesiastical corruption flourishes on these human institutions of government. The false Church finds her aliment in these human and carnal principles of society and law. But the time will come when God's judgment will fall on the false Church. The very beast and horns will destroy it. The carnal interests of human authority will be the means of destroying the false Christianity which they formerly supported. The wrath of man will praise God. And then the true Church—God's faithful ones—will be vindicated and glorified.—*Howard Crosby.*

Ver. 14. *The Overcoming Lamb.*—A great Person is here spoken of, and a great thing, it is declared, He will accomplish.

I. Consider **the Person** mentioned. He is not *a* lamb but *the* Lamb. He is the great, universal Lamb, causing the blood which He shed to spread itself, as it were, all over the world, so that every sinner might touch it, and be saved from his sins. See His personal qualities. 1. His *quietness.* It is in marked contrast with the lion. 2. Wonderful *patience.* How much He bore from His enemies! 3. Perfectly *innocent.* 4. Capable of exercising great *wrath.*

II. What **He shall overcome.**—"The Lamb shall overcome *them*;" which seems to have special reference to organised Antichrist. But He shall overcome all opposers, both nations and individuals.

III. How **He shall overcome His opposers.**—There are two general methods. One is that of using certain means to persuade rebellious hearts to become reconciled to God. His greatest effort has always been to overcome by the passion of His *love.* But the second method is that of *final banishment from His presence.* Oh, what can feeble man do against such an all-powerful being as Christ is? How utterly vain have been the threats of infidels, that they would banish Him from the world!—*C. H. Wetherbe.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOR the reasons given at the foot of page 553, no suggestions for exegetical or homiletical treatment are given in connection with chap. xviii.

CHAPTER XIX.

FINAL VICTORY OF THE LAMB.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

THE time now draws near for the *final* termination of the conflict. The irrevocable doom has been pronounced. But before the final consummation there is, as usual, a relief passage We have the song of victory sung in anticipation. These relief passages of this book the writer designed to cheer the spirits of the suffering and persecuted saints, and for their sake the book was written. The contents of the vers. 1-10 of this chapter may be thus divided: 1. All the inhabitants of the heavenly world join in a song of holy thanksgiving, in view of the coming vindication of the Divine honour. 2. A voice from the throne requires renewed praise, which is shouted. 3. The glorious prospect of suffering martyrs is disclosed. Then St. John falls at the feet of the angel-interpreter, who refuses homage which is due only to Him who is Lord and Master of them both.

Ver. 2. *Simcox* gives a sentence from the book of *Enoch*, xlvii. 4, in which a similar joy in God's judgments is expressed. "Then were the hearts of the saints full of joy, because the number of righteousness was arrived, the supplications of the saints heard, and the blood of the righteous appreciated by the Lord of Spirits." In the second portion of the chapter there is again a threefold division. 1. The appearance of the Great Captain of Salvation, with His hosts around Him, from the heavenly world (vers. 11-16). The Son of God Himself undertakes to lead the final battle. 2. The proclamation made to the ravenous beasts and birds to come and glut themselves with the slaughtered (vers. 17, 18). 3. The final overthrow and excision of the beast, the false prophet, and their army (vers. 19-21). Note that the victory is gained by purely spiritual means. Probably the confederacy of the powers of the world, under the leadership of Antichrist, will be primarily intellectual and spiritual.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—21.

The Vision of the "Word of God."—Are we to see in the victorious apparition of the Christ, described in chap. xix., an event purely spiritual, or a visible phenomenon? Jesus compares it to the lightning which shines instantaneously from the one end of heaven to the other (Luke xvii. 24). The latter view is the only one compatible with this expression. On the other hand, it follows from His use of this image that Jesus had no thought of a permanent and visible abode of His glorified Person on the earth, whether at Jerusalem or elsewhere, as the millenarians in all ages have thought. The *Parousia* will be, on the contrary, like the stroke of the red-hot rod, which is to startle mankind, absorbed in fleshly living, and to prepare the way for the mighty reaction whence the plenitude of the spiritual blessings of the millennium is to proceed. Living in a higher sphere, but near at hand, the faithful, who will have been glorified at the advent of the Lord, will be in communion with the early Christendom, just as the Risen Christ was in communion with His disciples until the ascension. This will be the time of the complete development of spiritual worship and of Christian civilisation, in which, as in the Middle Ages, but under the effects of the shining forth of a more intense and pure light, science, art, industry, commerce, will lend their resources to the Christian spirit to enable it to incarnate itself completely in the life of man. Then will be fulfilled the image of the leaven which leaveneth the whole lump. The number "a thousand," is symbolical, like all numbers in the Apocalypse. It represents a complete development which nothing external to itself will interfere with or abridge—an era which shall expand itself at ease in the latter days of history. It does not seem to us that the apocalyptic vision of the reign of a thousand years contains a single feature which overpasses the conception of which we have just sketched the outline. It is that perfect state of things which Ezekiel had already described in the last nine chapters of his prophecy, under the image of an ideal temple.—*F. Godet, D.D.*

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 12. *The Crowned Christ.*—This was a symbolic revelation of the extent and variety of the kingdoms over which Christ rules.

I. **In times of deep religious earnestness the very intensity of men's desire to serve Christ perfectly often makes them forget the actual service to which He has appointed them.**—The first impulse of some persons, when they begin to be in real earnest about serving Christ, is to look at a great part of their life as alienated from His service. Remember that on the head of Christ are many crowns, that all occupations of human life are His, and that every one who desires to serve Him can give Him, not fragments, but the whole of life, from first to last. You need not give up trade, if it is an honest one, to serve Christ. Serve Him in the trade itself, and remember that in trade, as in everything besides, He is King.

II. **And He is the King of the province of public life, too, and in politics, whether imperial or local, Christian men should still be serving and honouring Him.**—Christ is the King of our political life, and in that, as in every other province of our activity, we have to serve and honour Him.

III. **Christ is King of the spiritual life of man.**—Much of the weakness and sorrow of Christian people arise from forgetting this: we have to give Him reverence as well as trust, fear as well as love. We have to recognise His authority. The awe and devout fear with which we bow down before God are His, for He is God manifest in the flesh.—*R. W. Dale, D.D.*

Many Crowns.—We have all heard of uncrowned kings; but the term is a misnomer. St. John's surpasses all thoughts of one crown for earth's victor-kings.

I. **On His Head is the crown of the conquest of sin.**—This is THE victory. "All have sinned." Jesus is the "Lamb of God." "Unto Him Who loved us," etc.

II. **The crown of the conquest of sorrow.**—He revealed the Fatherhood of God. Holy compensation, the Father's house. "Let not your heart be troubled."

III. **The crown of the conquest of suffering.**

IV. **The crown of the conquest of Satan.**—No light conquest. In the wilderness and on the Cross. The humblest Christian warrior may now meet the assaults of the Evil One.

V. **The crown of the conquest of death.**—In heaven the redeemed feel and know death to be a conquered power.—*G. M. Statham.*

CHAPTER XX.

THE THOUSAND YEARS.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

EMINENT expositors, ancient and modern, regard the opening of this chapter as referring to an early period in the history of the Church, but there are many writers who consider the events as occurring in immediate succession to those foreshown in the end of chap. xix. *Stuart* points out the intentional brevity with which this portion of the prophecy is treated. "The events of a thousand years; the invasion of Gog and Magog, with their defeat; the ultimate confinement and punishment of Satan; and, lastly, the general judgment;—are all crowded into the space of *twelve* verses. This shows that the very distant future is designed to be merely glanced at by the writer. So it is with the Hebrew prophets. But here there is a special reason for brevity. The main object of the book is already accomplished. Christians have been consoled by assurances that all the enemies with whom the Church was then conflicting, would surely be overthrown. To complete an epic plan which involves a climactic progression of events, and to gratify the taste and feelings, the last part of the book is added. It seems to be added mainly for this purpose. Mere touches and glances are all which it exhibits, or which were intended to be exhibited. The eye of hope is directed forward, and sees the thousand years of uninterrupted prosperity; then the sudden destruction of a new and final enemy, and all the rest is left to joyful anticipation.

Ver. 1. **Bottomless pit.**—Explained in note on chap. ix. 1.

Ver. 2. **Old serpent.**—See on chap. xii. 9. **Thousand years.**—A figurative, not literal, period. With the Lord "a thousand years is as one day." It is safer to regard it as representing a *prolonged*, in contrast with a limited, period.

Ver. 4. **Thrones.**—Compare Dan. vii. 9, 22. There seem to be two classes of faithful souls introduced: those who had made the martyrs' testimony, and those who had given the testimony of noble lives. **Reigned with Christ.**—A figure for that kind of ruling power and influence which steadfast and heroic men and women always gain and exercise wherever they may be, even as Christ gained and exercised.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—15.

The Millennium-Picture.—The millennium-vision is, like so many of the apostolic visions, an ideal picture; it exhibits a state of things which is possible to mankind at any time. The vision has its approximate fulfilment, as the Church, in the faith of the reality of her Lord's victory, carries on her warfare against the prince of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places. That this approximate fulfilment is not unreal may be seen in the fact that Christendom has replaced heathendom; Christ has taken the throne of the world; the prince of this world has been judged; the ascendency of Christian thought and Christian principles has marvellously humanised and purified the world. To an Irenæus, a Polycarp, a Justin Martyr, a Tertullian, the picture of the world during the Christian centuries would have the aspect of a millennium, when contrasted with the age of Pagan dominion and Pagan persecution. In their eyes, accustomed to the darkness of heathenism, the world, as influenced by a widely-diffused Christianity, would seem to be a world in which Christ ruled. They would see, in the acknowledgment of apostles and martyrs and confessors, the wondrous resurrection-power of God's truth; they would see how they, who fell for Christ, had stepped from their forgotten graves to sit down with Christ in His throne. The apostles, the martyrs, the faithful, do reign with Christ. The sovereignty of the world belongs far more to St. Paul and St. John than to Nero or Galba. But though thus the saints rise and reign with Christ over Christendom, we can see that this is only an approximate realisation, and falls short of the ideal picture. Christendom established and heathendom overthrown would be a millennium in

the eyes of an Ignatius; but the Church of to day looks for a further and higher fulfilment. Is she justified in this expectation? If the principles we have laid down are correct, she is justified. She can accept the first-fruits of God's promises, but she will not mistake them for the harvest; she can rejoice in the growth of her Lord's kingdom, but she looks for the day when the powers of evil will be more effectually curbed, and the gospel will have freer course. Then the fulness of Christ's victory will be more clearly seen.—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XX.

Ver. 12. *The Final Judgment; The Certainty of Its Decisions.*—There is a machine in the Bank of England which receives sovereigns, as a mill receives grain, for the purpose of determining wholesale whether they are are of full weight. As they pass through, the machinery, by unerring laws, throws all that are light to one side, and all that are of full weight to another. That process is a silent but solemn parable for me. Founded as it is upon the laws of nature, it affords the most vivid similitude of the certainty which characterises the judgment of the great day. There are no mistakes or partialities to which the light may trust; the only hope lies in being of standard weight before they go in.—*Arnot.*

The Record of Our Lives.—With every turn of the turnstile on Waterloo Bridge a record (in the old time) was made against the gatekeeper, and he could not recall or obliterate it. Every movement of the wind over Greenwich Observatory, steady or capricious, fast or slow, is self-registered, with pencil and paper, by an apparatus communicating to a room below, in which blank paper is presented to the pencil by clockwork; and these autobiographical memoirs are carefully preserved. So constant and unerring is the record kept in the book of God's remembrance concerning all our actions, and even "every idle word that men shall speak" (Matt. xii. 36).

CHAPTER XXI.

THE NEW JERUSALEM.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

"Now is sealed the eternal doom of the dragon, beast, false prophet, and all their followers; yea, and of all who resemble them in the temper of their hearts or the action of their lives. Nothing remains but to exhibit the glorious reward of the righteous, in the eternal world, as contrasted with the awful punishment of the wicked."

Ver. 1. **New heavens and new earth.**—Isa. lxv. 17; compare Ezek. xl.—xlviii. and Matt. xix. 28. "Heavens" here refer to the firmament regarded as the dome above the earth; it is not the abode of the righteous. **No more sea.**—For ancient ideas of the sea, compare Isa. xlviii. 18, lvii. 21. "To the ancients the absence of sea seemed a pledge of security and of unfettered intercourse between all nations."

Ver. 2. **New Jerusalem.**—An ideal city, presented under figures that represent perfection—the perfection of purity, beauty, and joy.

Ver. 3. **Tabernacle of God.**—Figure from the conception of Jehovah as resident in the old Jewish tabernacle.

Ver. 10. **Holy Jerusalem.**—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter* skilfully presents the leading features: "The great and holy community will be one which draws its glory from God (chaps. xxi. 11, 23, xxii. 5). Its blessings are not for a few, but open to all; for its gates lie open to all quarters (chap. xxi. 12, 13). The heavenly and the earthly will be at one; angels, apostles, and patriarchs are there (vers. 12, 14). Diverse characters will find entrance there; the gates bear the names of the twelve tribes. The door of admission is alike for all, though diverse characters, from diverse quarters, will enter in (ver. 21). It will be the abode of all that is fair and good, and no disproportions will mar its loveliness (vers. 17, 18). The ancient truths, spoken by various lips, will be found to be eternal truths, full of varied but

consistent beauty (vers. 14, 19, 20). The forms and helps which were needful here will not be needful there (vers. 22, 23); all that the servants of God have righteously hungered and thirsted for here, will be supplied there (vers. 1, 2). There will be blessings, various, continuous, eternal; new fields of labour, and new possibilities of service, will be opened there."

Ver. 7. **Loosed from his prison**,—As this is the indication of some future condition, it is impossible to explain it. Taken mystically, the binding of Satan implied restraint put upon his power of freedom and action; the loosing means the removal of those restraints. Christendom, even in its times of glorious success, is exposed to the influences of the evil one. **Gog and Magog**.—See Gen. x. 2; Ezek. xxxviii., xxxix. "In Rabbinical books these names were used to describe the nations that would rise against the reign of Messiah. The names are to be understood figuratively."

Ver. 12. **Stand before God**.—This representation of the judgment is a vision, and it would be unwise to treat it as literally descriptive. Compare our Lord's being shown, in a moment of time, "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them." **Book of life**.—Compare Dan. xii. 1.

Ver. 13. **Hell**.—*Sheol*, the Hebrew equivalent of Hades. Those buried at sea are thought of as not being in the *grave*: a curious distinction.

Ver. 14. **Lake of fire**.—This is pure imagery; fire to burn such things as death and the grave cannot possibly be literally explained. It is to be understood as the material representation of the "second death." "Here is a resurrection, not to life, but to a death far more terrible than that which ends this life."

Note on the "Second Death" or "Lake of Fire."—It is a death of which the first death—the physical death, now destroyed—was but a faint figure. It is a condition which needs no coarse exaggeration, or vulgar literalisation of the prophetic imagery, to heighten the horror of it. Very awful is that spiritual death which knows not and loves not God, and from which Christ has come to arouse us; more awful must be that second death, in which the spirit, no longer the sinning victim of hereditary evil, has become the victim of habitual choice of wrong, loving darkness rather than light, and choosing alienation rather than reconciliation—the husks of the swine rather than the Father's house. Of the full meaning of the words, in their true and *future* force, we can have little conception. It is enough for us to remember two things: they are figurative, but they are figurative of *something*.—*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—27.

The Millennial State.—In the latter part of chap. xx., and in chaps. xxi.—xxii. 5, all Christ's enemies are destroyed, and the happiness of the saints is perfected. Upon the millennial bliss of the redeemed, and upon the glory and happiness of the New Jerusalem, it is not possible to dwell. Suffice it to say, that we are to behold in the former a figure of the perfected and eternally secured life of those who not only die, but rise, with Christ; and that in the latter we have a bright and beautiful, as well as elevating, picture of that new condition into which the followers of Jesus are introduced, even on this side the grave, and amidst the labours and trials of their present pilgrimage. Nothing, we are persuaded, has tended more to perplex the interpretation of the Apocalypse than the idea that that holy city which St. John saw "coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" is intended to represent a glorious state into which the redeemed shall enter, sooner or later, after the close of their earthly pilgrimage, but before they obtain possession of their eternal inheritance. Taking such a view, it is impossible to interpret fairly all the expressions of the passage, while it deprives us, at the same time, of the thought of those sublime privileges which, as we are everywhere taught in Scripture, are not the future only, but the present inheritance of God's children. It is true, indeed, that even they who are "in" Christ Jesus are still surrounded by a darkness which has no place in the heavenly Jerusalem; that they have still to shed tears which are there washed away; and that they have still to fear that they must meet that death which shall there be swallowed up of victory. Calling these things to mind, it can be no matter of surprise that many have difficulty in believing that the brightness and glory of this celestial

city can, under any point of view, represent an earthly scene through which we are thankful if we may but grope our way, "fightings without, and fears within." Yet let them remember that the Christian life has two sides, those two which are brought forward so prominently by the Apostle, when he speaks of himself and his fellow ministers "as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowing, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. v. 1, 9, 10). Let them remember that, if the follower of Christ dies daily with his Lord, he also rises with Him daily, and ascends to the heavenly places, and is set down there, his life not maintained amidst the things of earth, but "hid with Christ in God." Let these thoughts be ever present to their minds, and they will not have much difficulty in seeing that in the description of the new Jerusalem we have the ideal side of the Christian's position, elevated to its highest point and illuminated with its brightest colouring, but still a side that is true to one aspect of his present state.—*W. Milligan, D.D.*

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 1. *A Strange Picture of the Future.*—Who among us does not love the sea, and feel thankful that the Bible permits us to learn from *it* concerning God, and the future life? But *our* associations make it almost impossible for us to realise the joy of a time when "there shall be no more sea." The landscapes of the heavenly world we cannot imagine will be beautiful without either near or far glimpses of the sea. The air of the heavenly world we can hardly think will be pure and rich and reviving if it does not blow over a restless, waving sea. There must, however, be some good reasons for putting the glory of the heavenly scenes under this figure. The meanings attaching to natural emblems differ in different times, and nations, and individuals, and when the Apostle John wrote this book of Revelation, men did not think of the "sea" as we think of it now. Indeed, throughout the Scriptures the sea is regarded as an object of fear and terror; its majesty, its greatness, its mastery, seem mostly to have impressed men then. It was not yet tamed by human skill. The compass was not known; the few vessels they had were inefficiently constructed for ocean-sailing; they seldom ventured out of sight of land. The dangers of sandbank, rock, headland, and current, were not marked on chart, or by buoy and lighthouse, and only the most adventurous spirits would risk their lives on the treacherous wave. The Jews, throughout their history, take no place as sailors; indeed, the whole sea-board of Canaan contains but one or two harbours. Scripture speaks of "the raging of the sea," of the "raging waves of the sea"; of its "voice roaring," of the "floods lifting up their voice," of "the wicked being like the troubled sea," of "those that go down to the sea in ships seeing the wonders of the Lord, and His judgments in the deep," of the "great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable." And even when it seems to have a gentle thought, saying, "There go the ships"; as if, like us, it loved to watch—

> "The stately ships go on
> To their harbour under the hill,"

at once it adds the note of power and fear—"there is that Leviathan whom thou hast made to play therein." Only as we enter into the Bible associations of the sea shall we feel the meaning of its figure for the future world—"There shall be no more sea." But more must be added. When John wrote down these visions he was "our companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, and was in the isle that is called Patmos for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." Patmos is a rocky and bare island in the

Ægean Sea, and was used by the Romans as a place of banishment, something as St. Helena has been by us. There John was separated from his fellow-Christians, and from his loved work; the sea was his divider, and we can well understand how, looking on that wide waste of pathless waters all around him, his heart would fashion this image of the life to come —"There shall be no more sea." The common idea of the age, and the special circumstances of the apostle, help us to reach the proper suggestions of a figure so unsuitable to our own feelings. We even know that the sea—the moving, and the storms of the sea—are necessary to life and health. The air is tempered which passes over it; the wants of men are met by its provisions of food; disease is dispelled by its tempests and commotions. And yet, for all the usefulness of the sea, and all the pleasure of it, there are times when, to *our* hearts, the figure of the text carries its full meaning; and in the light of that meaning we can anticipate "the new heavens and earth, in which there shall be no more sea." The sea seems to gather up for us the various forms of trouble and anxiety that come to us in this life; the various forms of trouble from which we hope to be delivered in the coming life. The troubles that arise out of Separation, Danger, Mystery, Change, and Conflict.

I. **If the sea be to us the symbol of separation,** and so of those earthly troubles that come by separations, we shall see meaning and force in this promise for the future—"There shall be no more sea."—True the ocean is now the pathway of nations. In all the interchanges of commerce, and friendship, and travel, we make well-defined tracks over the waters, and knit land to land more easily than when mountain ranges divide kingdoms. Let but any one watch in the Downs, and see the thousand ships passing in picturesque procession to and from the Thames, and he will feel it very hard to call the sea a divider. Think but of the ropes that pass beneath the wave, and carry lightning messages to the ends of the earth, and it seems strange to speak of the sea as a separator. Yet in no day has it been such a breaker-up of families and homes as in these emigrating days of ours. Few of us are without dear friends settled in distant lands, severed from us by the great wave. Many a mother, many a father, many a lover, feels most keenly that the sea is only a little less a separator than the grave. Why those tears wrung out of the agonies of parting, save that to human feeling every mile of ocean seems to lift up a higher, and at last impassable, barrier between us and them? How many a friend has watched the ship fading in the distance that bore the beloved away, and turned back to life with all the agony of desolation, feeling as if divided from them for ever!

> "How hard to follow, with lips that quiver,
> That moving speck on the far-off side!
> Farther, farther—I see it—know it;
> My eyes brim over. It melts away.
> Only my heart to my heart shall show it,
> As I walk desolate, day by day."
>
> *Jean Ingelow.*

That, indeed, is only separation of *space*. Across the dividing sea, heart may beat true to heart, and fellowship be kept. There are worse dividers than the sea. Envies, and suspicions, and jealousies, come breaking up our life-unions and our friendships, and some of the sorest of human sorrows belong to these failing friendships and wounded trusts. Gather them all, then, into the symbol of the wounded trusts. Gather them all, then, into the symbol of the sea. Let it remind you of all the woes that have come out of separations, all through your life; even let it recall how the great separator death again and again sets his wide, rolling river between you and those you loved. Yes, even think how those dear to you, part of the host, have crossed the great flood, and are now divided by the sea of death from you. And then turn to our text; let thought and heart fill its pictures of the future with tenderness, and peaceful resting to your soul. No

ship shall sail out from the heavenly harbours, bearing away from you your boys. No rolling waves of mistrust shall toss between you and your friend. No night-moaning sea of death shall bear away on its bosom your beloved. "There shall be no more sea." "They go no more out for ever."

"Here we suffer grief and pain,
Here we meet to part again:
In Heaven we part no more."

II. **If the sea be to us the emblem of danger,** reminding us of the perils to which our daily life is exposed, we shall feel the force of the text. Those dangers do, indeed, meet us everywhere: on road and rail, at home and abroad. "In the midst of life we are in death." But we get the largest and most affecting impressions of danger from the records of the sea. Shipwreck is a most familiar word—so familiar that if there be not special circumstances of horror, it passes almost unheeded by us. The sea is the most masterful thing with which a man has to do. He does, at best, but hold his own with it, and that only by watching it, and fitting himself to its moods. Step on deck, knowing that, for days together, you will lose all sight of land, and scarcely meet another sail, and who can wonder that the sense of danger makes you lift your heart to God? But those only feel how the sea symbolises danger who have *lost* a friend at sea. Its peril then has come right home to them. Down in her solitary depths their loved one made a grave; and the heart almost shudders now to look upon the dreadful sea that devoured him. Had we a sailor's widow here, how much her heart could tell us of the perils of the deep! Is your heart sensitive and sympathising enough to hear her moan?

"My boat, you shall find none fairer afloat,
In river or port.
Long I looked out for the lad she bore,
On the open, desolate sea,
And I think he sailed to the heavenly shore,
For he came not back to me—
Ah me!"
Jean Ingelow.

But these are only dangers to the *body*. May we rise to the higher dangers that put the soul's life in peril; dangers hovering round our moral life, putting in peril character and virtue? And then, taking the sea as our emblem of both, does not the text begin to glow with meaning, as it promises the peace of established, settled, untempted goodness for ever?—"he that is righteous, righteous still; and he that is holy, holy still." Watch and guard no more, as now, our first duty, and done at cost of weariness and pain. But rejoicing, resting, safety, the peace of God, about us for ever; no more treacherous, perilous, storm-tossed seas. We shall hear that "blessedest, best sound, the boat-keel grazing on the strand," as we enter, once and for ever, the safe, quiet harbour of our God. Safe home at last.

III. **If we deeply feel how the sea symbolises the mystery** of our present life, we shall put meaning into the promise of our text. Have you ever done thinking about the sea? Ever done asking insoluble questions about it? Ever done watching its various moods? Ever seen all its possible colourings? Ever heard all its many-sounding voices? One of the greatest indications that God Himself is a sublimer mystery than even the sea, lies in this statement: "He ruleth the seas"; He "holdeth the waters in the hollow of His hand." It may well symbolise for us the mysteries, often so distressing, so agonising, with which we are surrounded. Mysteries of life, of truth, of duty, of ourselves, of God, and of eternity. How passionately we dash against some of these encircling walls!—as if we would force nature and truth to yield us their secrets. The day is coming when we shall win the *open vision*. Many of us anticipate heaven with unbounded enthusiasm, because then we shall *see*, then we shall *know*; shut doors, at which here we vainly hammered, shall be open; dark things, that puzzled us sorely, shall shine in the light of God. There shall be no more sea of mystery. In

comparison with present limitations, our mind and soul shall feel free; and for ennobled faculties all the glory of God shall be open to research. For some, at least, the prospect makes heaven infinitely attractive. The Lamb is the light thereof, and "we shall know hereafter."

IV. **If we regard the sea as the emblem of change,** we shall see the meaning of our text. It is well called the troubled, restless sea; and this we feel quite as truly in summer calm, when only gentle winds blow across it, as in winter conflicts, when wild winds raise high its tides. We feel it quite as much when we watch the varying waves fling themselves on the rocks, and cast up showers of spray in ever-differing forms, as when, journeying on the waters, we see them swirl past the vessel, and all around us heave and toss. Nothing can so well illustrate that sense of the changefulness of life which oppresses us when years of memory lengthen. The "fashion of this world is ever passing away." What chequered, varying lives ours all have been! Indeed, we never set ourselves down anywhere *now*, to say "Here I shall stay," or, looking around us, say, "All this I shall keep." "Here we have no continuing city." But when the heart in us pines for something to hold, something to keep, something that is unchangeable, Bible figure points us on; not now, not here, it seems to say. The sea is all about you now. A time is coming when there shall be no more change, "no more sea." No more change as we have felt its bitterness here. "Therefore lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal." Changes are good, while we are struggling with sin, and after holiness; but through changes we are reaching the unchanging rest of God, and the sea of the future is the calm, ever-resting sea of glass, mingled with fire.

V. **If we think of the sea as the emblem of conflict,** we shall add meaning to the text. It may not have been your lot to watch a storm at sea. It is the most sublime illustration of conflict that I know. The lightning flash, that for a moment relieves the darkness, shows the seething, boiling waters, in a tumult of war, and the ship hardly straining and steadying itself, and keeping its prow well facing wind and wave. Such a storm I saw in early life, and its impressions can never be effaced. In half agony one thought, Could even the rocks withstand these waters when thus they lifted up their majesty? What could the little ships do amid forces so tremendous as these?—the loud thunder answering back to the deep baying of the troubled waves. It may well represent that conflict which is the law now for us in all conditions of life. We must fight. Everything in the world—the family, or the Church—that is worth having, must be won in a battle-field. Like wind, and wave, and storm, are "the world, the flesh, and the devil," and sometimes they *unite* to beat upon, and strive to overcome, our soul-ships, as they voyage on to God. Is it oppressing you to-day that life is a conflict? Are you weary with it? Can you understand David saying, "Oh that I had wings like a dove, then would I flee away and be at rest"! God stills your heart to rest by the message He sends you to-day, and the promise He gives. A little while, only a little while, and then there shall be no more sea—

> "Not a wave of trouble roll
> Across thy peaceful breast."
>
> "What hath he at last?
> Sorrow vanquished, conflict ended,
> Jordan past."

Does it seem to you that these thoughts have been somewhat melancholy in tone? I have wanted them to lead on to the brightness and joy of a large and blessed hope. We must be sometimes reminding you how full our present life is of trying and sorrowful scenes; but we never do so in hopeless spirits—never to help you brood over the large share of trouble put into your lot—never to make you miserable, and give ground for those who plead

that our religion clouds our human life with gloom. We want to produce and keep alive a profound and affecting dissatisfaction with present scenes; to sever hearts from too close clinging to the world, and the things of the world. We do want to make you feel that this is not your rest; to lift your eyes right up, and set them looking right away from the hills and vales of earth to the hills of God, whence only cometh our help. We do want to kindle in your souls that great, glorious, blessed hope of eternal life with God, which will shine on present scenes so as to make them appear insignificant and worthless. We would so fill your souls with visions of the future that you could each one say to his heart, "Go up, heart, into a little higher fighting, a little longer waiting and bearing. Be brave unto shadows; soon the shadows will flee away. Be strong in the battle-field; soon the archangel's trump shall stop the conflict, and call the victors to their crown. Be patient in the darkness: day is breaking, even the day of God. Bear nobly even heart-breaking separations: the time is coming when there shall be no more dividing; heart shall beat with heart in the communion of heaven for ever." "I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men: and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people; and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." Out of the depths, then, let us lift our eyes to-day. Our redemption draweth nigh. Over the restless ocean of life we journey now; but with Christ in the vessel there is safe guiding, and one day the abundant entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. And well we know we scarce shall win our welcome ere we cast our crowns at the enthroned Redeemer's feet, saying, "Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever." I have but another word. Reverse our text and make it a vision of the future for those who love not Christ, and do not serve God in the gospel of His Son. Conceive what an awful future is suggested by these words: "it shall be all sea"; all wide, wild wastes of midnight, howling, storm-tossed, wintry waters; never dropping into calm; never lit by the summer sunshine; full of separation, danger, mystery, suffering, conflict. I cannot image it to you. The soul shudders at the awful picture of the future awaiting those who love not God, and refuse the gospel of His Son. "*Now* is the accepted time; *now* is the day of salvation."

No More Sea.—What is meant by this symbol is best ascertained by remembering how the sea appears in the Old Testament. The Jew was not a sailor. In the Old Testament it is a symbol of mystery, of rebellious power, and of perpetual unrest. 1. The revelation of a future in which there shall be no more painful mystery. 2. The text tells of a state that is to come, when there shall be no more rebellious power. God lets people work against His kingdom in this world. It is not to be always so. 3. The text foretells a state of things in which there is no more disquiet and unrest. Life is a voyage over a turbulent sea. Changing circumstances come rolling after each other, like the undistinguishable billows of the great ocean. Tempests and storms rise. *That* is life. But there is an end to it some day, and it is worth while for us to think about our "island home, far, far beyond the sea."—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

Vers. 3, 4. *God's Tabernacle with Men.*

Consider—

I. **The sentiments of which this proclamation is expressive.**—We perceive in it—1. The exultation of joyous discovery. 2. The rapture of sacred astonishment. 3. The eagerness of solemn expectation. 4. The expression

of the force of a benevolent interest in all that pertains to the welfare and destiny of man. 5. The satisfaction of devout intelligence, beholding, in the events which it contemplates, fresh attestations of the stability and fulness of its own eternal welfare, as dependent on the Divine counsels and character. 6. Preparation for instant and cheerful concurrence in the effecting of God's purposes, and the advancement of His glory.

II. **The events by which it is called forth.**—1. The wonders of providence, as exhibiting God's concern, and individual, as well as constant regard for human welfare. 2. The sublimer wonders of redemption. 3. The mysteries of the sanctifying influence. 4. The final revelations of the Divine power and greatness through all time and eternity.

III. **The manner wherein it teaches us to reflect both on our privileges and duties.**—We should meditate: (1) with mingled gratitude and wonder; (2) with united watchfulness and diligence; (3) a corresponding appreciation of every ordinance which confirms it; (4) a sacred ambition and ardour to diffuse its knowledge among thoe yet destitute of it; (5) a holy desire for the final manifestation of God.—*R. S. McAll.*

Ver. 5. *The Renewal of All Things.* I. **The need of a complete moral renewal.** All visions of a political or economic millennium wreck themselves upon the obstinate fact of human depravity. With this, legislators, philosophers, and moralists, have been found powerless to deal. The gospel alone builds its hope upon a complete moral renewal of humanity, making "all things new"—chief among them the heart of man.

II. **An adequate power.**—"He that sitteth on the throne." At this point, too, the best human systems of morality fail. But He who created the human soul can renew it. The hardest heart can be broken, the worst disposition changed, when Omnipotence rises up to work. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus, or of the three thousand in a day, come with infinite ease within the sweep of His power.

III. **The wonder of regeneration.**—For this stupendous thing we ask whenever we pray for the conversion of a soul: that the omnipotent Jehovah will reach down from the heaven of heavens and mould all the powers and activities of that soul to His own Divine image—in that soul "make all things new."

IV. **The secret of "holding out."**—If conversion is not a varnish put on the outside, not a mere "good resolution" of man, but a renewal of "all things"—purposes, desires, ambitions, loves and hates—by Divine power, that renewed soul will "walk in newness of life."

V. **The great need of the Church: a regenerate membership.**—No more proud, covetous, envious, hot-tempered unscrupulous Church members, excusing these inconsistencies as "natural," but, in the glory of the renewed nature, "growing up into Him in *all* things who is the head, even Christ." Such a Church is the ideal of Christianity, and the hope of the world.

VI. **The ultimate renewal of all outward things: nations, nature.**—"The kingdoms of the world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ"; "the creation also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God"—"new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."—*I. C. Fernald.*

Ver. 17. *Wherewith to Measure Life.*—The measure of a man is here identified with the measure of an angel. Here is a Divine scale of measurement, and one which, if we would apply it to our lives, would make them sublime indeed!

I. **It is the curse of our race that, though God made our souls, like our bodies, upright, and fitted to gaze on heaven, we walk like Mammon, with earthward eyes.**—Jesus contemned the

offer of the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. Men will be lofty or low, according to the office to which they direct their souls. If their ideal be dwarfed and miserable, their lives, too, will be small and mean.

II. **You may judge of this by large as well as by small examples.**—Take in your hands the great works of history, and see how grievously nations have suffered when their multitudes have been misled by false admirations.

III. **But perhaps we may be misled if we make our deductions too broad.**—Look, then, at sections and phases of Society only. Any class of society is degraded when it acquiesces in, much more when it admires, immoral favourites.

IV. **To each of us individually—to our nation, to our Church—it is of supreme importance that we lift our eyes to the galaxy of great examples, and reflect the luminous virtue of heavenly ideals.**—The sole hope of humanity is in its good and holy men. All earth's purest and noblest come and lay garlands at the feet of these statues, but the crowd of the vulgar clamber up the pedestal, with no other object than to injure and to deface. How can a man have any light or sweetness left in him who delights to feed himself on calumny and falsehood until the devil has drawn down his soul into incurable littleness, as the worm "draws in the withered leaf, and makes it earth"?

V. **I have faith in manhood when I see men choosing lofty ideals, turning with scorn from all that is frivolous, leaving things base to perish of their own natural corruption, claiming their affinity with all things worthy, and measuring their lives with the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.**—Such thoughts produce pure and high-souled men.

VI. **Can one ask, without a sigh, whether it is a common thing for men thus to measure their lives with the measure of a man—that, is, of an angel?**—1. *To what multitudes among us is not the love of money a root of all kinds of evils?* How insignificant a fraction of their means do some men spare for the needs of their Church, the glory of their God, and the good of their fellow-men! The worshipper of Mammon—by what does he measure his life? Is it not by the measure of the wretchedest spirit that fell? 2. *Others measure their life by the measure of a fiend.* A drunkard—the helpless bondslave of a dead poison, sinking into penury and rags, or in some drunken orgy becoming a felon, or even a murderer. 3. *Do not others measure life with the measure of a beast?* The selfish, the unclean, the greedy, the immoral, do this. 4. *Others by the measure of the world.* We must learn one great Divine lesson in two aspects. Respect for human nature in ourselves; and also in others. In our faith in the Incarnation lies the very heart and essence of Christianity. Angels are but ministering spirits. "All angels worship Him."—*Canon F. W. Farrar, D.D.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXI.

Ver. 10. *The New Jerusalem.—Josiah Conder*, in his work on "The Harmony of History with Prophecy," remarks, on the above passage: "In its general plan, the symbolical city presents a striking resemblance to the description of Ecbatana, furnished by the Father of secular history. 'Of this city, one wall encompassed another, and each rose by the height of its battlements above the one beyond it. The ground, which was a circular hill, favoured this construction, but it owed still more to the labours bestowed upon the work. The orbicular walls were seven in number: within the last stood the royal palace and the treasuries. The largest of the walls nearly equalled the circumference of Athens. The battlements of this outer wall were white; those of the second, black; of the third, purple; of the fourth, blue; of the fifth, orange; all the battlements being thus covered with a pigment. Of the last two walls, the battlements of the one were plated with silver, those of the other with gold.' Thus the Median city consisted of seven circular terraces, each distinguished by the

colour of its wall, whereas the Apocalyptic city is described as a quadrangle of twelve stages or foundations; but the points of coincidence are highly illustrative of the emblematic description. The precious stones of which the walls of the holy city appeared to consist, whatever mystical or symbolical significance may attach to them, are obviously intended to describe the colour of each resplendent elevation; and, although the colours do not occur in the precise prismatic order, the combination would have the general effect of a double rainbow."

Ver. 18. *Gold as Compared with Glass.*—"Gold comes into consideration here on account of its splendour. 'The white jasper,' says Bengel, 'and the yellow gold harmonise well together.' The point of comparison between the gold and the glass is expressly intimated. It stands simply in the *purity*; the transparency, noticed in ver. 21, is that of the glass, not of the gold, and taken into account merely as the symbol of purity. All gold is not pure; glass, considered generally, is so, and therefore, what is pure only exceptionally is compared with it" (*Hengstenberg*). Though *coloured* glass and *opaque* glass were known as far back as the early Egyptian era, it was only in the reign of Nero that clear, transparent glass came into fashion. A great demand sprang up at once for it. Hence John, in speaking of it, uses it as we would the railway or telegraph, etc., and by so doing shows that his book was written *after* Nero's reign. Possibly some other allusions of the same kind may exist."

Vers. 19, 20. *Precious Stones.*—"When quartz or flint is found uncrystallised, and more opaque, of various colours, from white to black, it constitutes chalcedony" (Greek, *chalkedon*). Of this there are several varieties; the onyx and sardonyx, the sardius, or carnelian; and the chrysoprase; and the Oriental jasper already noticed. The colour of chalcedony is either bluish or milky grey. The chrysoprase is of an apple-green colour. The former has a wavy appearance, somewhat resembling agate, and is said to have been originally found at Chalcedon, in Bithynia, whence its name. The best carnelians are obtained from the East Indies, Japan, and Surat. It is also found in Europe and America. The word carnelian is derived from the Latin *carnis*, flesh, on account of its fleshy colour. Its Hebrew name has also reference to its colour. "When first found these stones are of a dark olive colour, and obtain the lighter red or white hue by exposure to the air, or by being baked, it is said, in ovens. It takes a beautiful polish, and is used for seals and ornaments. It was among the precious things of Tyre. In a mountain near Damar is found a stone which the Arabs call *ayek yemani*, and which they hold in the highest estimation. It is of a red or rather light brown colour, and seems to be a carnelian. The natives set it in rings or bracelets, and ascribe to it the talismanic virtue of healing wounds, and stanching blood when instantly applied." Moses, the most ancient and inspired historian, tells us that the land of Havilah abounded in the onyx stone (Hebrew, *shehem*; Greek, *onuchion*). The Hebrew word is variously translated by learned men; but it is certain, from the testimony of both the sacred and profane writers, that Arabia abounded in precious stones. *Pliny* says it was common in the mountains of Arabia; and *Niebuhr* says that he "saw quantities of the stones in the road, as he journeyed from Mount Taœs to Mount Sumara." Another writer tells us that "not only was the onyx plentiful in Arabia, but they adorned their walls with it" (Rev. xxi. 19, 20). And the prophet Ezekiel also speaks of the precious stones from Sheba and Raamah, in which the Arabians traded with Tyre (Ezek. xxvii. 22). The onyx and sardonyx (so called from its resemblance to the sardius in colour) are both of a flinty texture, composed of layers of chalcedony of different colours. "Some antique *cameos* were made from these stones, by leaving the figure, or head, in the whiter stratum, while the background was cut down to that which is darker coloured." *Miss Sedgwick* says that in the room of gems in the Museo Borbonico, Naples, was an onyx, considered the finest cameo in Europe. It was as large as a plate. On one side was represented the "Nile and its fertility," and on the other Medusa's head. These stones are all referred to in the beautiful picture which the apostle gives of the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city; and this description was quite in accordance with the splendour of Eastern palaces. "The first object that attracts attention," says *Franklin*, in his History of Shah Allum, "is the public hall of audience. . . . It is adorned with excessive magnificence. I judge the building to be a hundred and fifty feet in length. The roof is flat, supported by numerous columns of fine white marble, which have been richly ornamented with inlaid flower work of carnelian and different coloured stones. . . . The inside of the wall, about two-thirds of the way up, is lined with marble, having beautiful borders of flowers, worked in carnelians and other stones, executed with much taste. . . . It is evident the apostle drew his magnificent description of the walls of the holy city from these pictures of gorgeous splendour. The coarser materials of brick and mud, of which the walls in many royal gardens of the East are composed, are entirely hid by the brilliant and dazzling profusion of gems that everywhere sparkle along the whole length of walls. But how far superior the holy city!

"Its walls all precious stones combine;
Its gates their leaves of pearl unfold;
Its holy mansions far outshine
Transparent glass and burnished gold.
In that bright city I would dwell,
With that blest Church the Saviour praise;
And, safe redeemed from death and hell,
Sit at His feet through endless days.'"

H. H.

Ver. 20. *Chrysolite*: *Topaz.* — (Hebrew, *pitdah*, topaz; Greek, *topazion.*)—Chrysolite really means the golden stone, and is a general term for stones having a golden hue. The colours of what we call chrysolite are a green, sometimes yellowish or brownish, with a white streak. It is bright and transparent, but is seldom larger than a pin's head, and is used in jewellery. It is obtained chiefly from the Levant. There is a variety of this stone called *olivine*, on account of its colour, which is found in basalt in Bohemia, Hungary, and on the banks of the Rhine. The chrysolite of this verse was probably what we now call topaz. The topaz is a very beautiful gem, sometimes nearly transparent, and of different sizes, forms, and colours. Its general colour is bright yellow, tinged with red, orange, or green, and it is found in some countries of a blue green, or yellow colour. The Brazilian species is often as transparent as a piece of ice when the surface is melting. It is embedded in granite and other rocks in every part of the world, chiefly in veins of tin. It is either in crystal or in rounded masses, sometimes weighing several ounces. In Scotland, the topaz is found at *Cairngorm*, and receives its name from that place. The Oriental topazes were highly esteemed. Those of Ethiopia were celebrated for their wonderful lustre. *Pliny* says the topaz belonged to Arabia, and derived its name from the island *Topazos.*

Ver. 23. *The Glory of Heaven.*—How transcendent the glory of that world where there shall be no more sin nor imperfection—where all shall unite in the song, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain"! "The glory of the Lord (doth) lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." The idolatrous temple of Diana was so bright and splendid that the door-keeper always cried to them that entered in, "Take heed to your eyes." But what faculties of vision must we have to behold the glory of the temple above! If it is said that the righteous themselves shall shine forth as the sun, what will be the splendour of the Eternal Throne? What a delightful change, from this world of darkness and imperfection to that where all shall be light and glory!

Ver. 27. *The "Holy" City.*—Without holiness there can be no such heaven as the New Testament reveals. There may be scenery of surpassing grandeur—mountains, woods, rivers, and skies, most charming; but they do not make a heaven, else a heaven might be found in Wales or Cumberland. There may be a capital full of palaces and temples; but they do not make a heaven, else a heaven might have been found in Delhi. There may be buildings of marbles and precious stones; but they do not make a heaven, else a heaven might have been in Rome or Venice. There may be health, and ease, and luxury, and festivities; but they do not make a heaven, else one would have been met with in Belshazzar's halls. There may be education, philosophy, poetry, literature, art; but that will not make a heaven, else the Greeks would have had one in Athens, in the grove, and in the porch. Holiness is that without which no heaven could exist.—*Rev. John Stoughton.*

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RESTORED PARADISE, AND THE EPILOGUE.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.

THE first five verses complete the description of the new heavens and new earth. There is evident reference in the figures of the tree of life and the river that flows by the trees, to the first and forfeited paradise. The Epilogue is brief, but pertinent and impressive. The angel-guide and interpreter reassures the seer that all which has been disclosed is certain; and he repeats what was said in the prologue to the book respecting its design to unveil the future to the servants of God, and to disclose the blessedness of those who keep in mind what has been revealed. John, filled with reverence and astonishment, falls again at the feet of the angel, to do him homage; but he is warned by the angel that he himself is only a fellow-servant of God, and a fellow-labourer with the prophets who disclose the Divine will. The angel, moreover, warns him not to seal up the book, as if it were to be reserved for some distant period. On the contrary, the time is near—*i.e.*, the time when the series of events commences. Jesus Himself is introduced as closing the scene. He declares that He has sent His angel to make the disclosures which the book contains, and that He is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament, the Offspring of David, and the Light of the World. To His promise that He will come quickly, the Spirit which speaks in His prophets, and the bride, *i.e.* the Church, respond and say, Come! All, moreover, who read or hear the words of the book are exhorted to unite in the expression of the same ardent desire.

Ver. 1. **Proceeding out of the throne.**—Compare Ezek. xlvii.; Gen. ii. 10.

Ver. 2. **Nations.**—Apparently those outside the city.

Ver. 3. **Curse.**—Compare that pronounced on the ground because of Adam's sin.

Ver. 4. **See His face.**—To be understood as implying some *manifestation* of God, answering to the capacities (senses) of the redeemed. Sight of God as the absolute Being is inconceivable for any who are in creature-conditions.

Ver. 15. **Dogs.**—Dogs are regarded in the East as unclean animals. Compare chap. ix. 21, xxi. 8.

Ver. 18. **Any man shall add,** etc.—See Deut. iv. 2, xii. 32. "The parallel of those passages proves that the curse denounced is on those who interpolate unauthorised *doctrines* in the prophecy, or who neglect essential ones, not on transcribers who might unadvisedly interpolate or omit something in the true text. The curse, if understood in the latter sense, has been remarkably ineffective, for the common text of this book is more corrupt, and the true text oftener doubtful, than in any part of the New Testament. But it may be feared that the additions and omissions in the more serious sense have also been frequently made by rash interpreters. It is certain that the curse is designed to guard the integrity of *this* book of the Revelation, and not to *close* the New Testament Canon. It is not even certain that this was the last written of the canonical books" (*W. H. Simcox, M.A.*). St. John simply means to prohibit, in the most solemn manner, all tampering with his own work.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—21.

The Permanence of Evil.—It cannot be assured that the subject dealt with in this chapter is the "final restitution of all things." It may even be fairly disputed whether the book of Revelation is in any sense historical. It is so manifestly a teaching by symbols and prophetic figures that we do not wisely associate with it a chronological order. Its scenes may be synchronous in many cases, descriptive of what occurs in different parts of the earth. It may even not be descriptive at all, but suggestive of moral or immoral forces, and of varying Divine judgments. Without attempting to explain what the book of Revelation is, we may with confidence affirm that the meanings of it are too uncertain for us to build perplexing doctrines upon it. And certainly, to conclude that evil will continue after the final issues of the great redemption are reached, and to base that conclusion on the passage now before us, would be wholly unwarranted. Apart from preconceived and biassing notions, the refer-

ence of the passage would seem to be a very simple one. John is bidden not to "seal up the sayings of the prophecy of this book," because the time of closing up, though at hand, is not *come*; and until it does come, preaching and prophecy must be agencies working amongst men. Evil men will be going on in their evil, and need warnings; good men will be growing better through much struggle, and so will need much encouragement. The very point is that there is no fixity yet, and so for every one there is hope. The passage is really an echo of the parable of the tares. "Let both grow together until the harvest," even if it should seem to you that the harvest is close at hand. Ver. 11 is rather a statement of fact than a direction of conduct, or a prophecy of the future, and this is indicated by the correction of the Revised Version. The results of the preached gospel are always such as described here: "to some it is savour of life unto life, to others of death unto death"; but we must go on preaching that gospel, even if the apparent issue be a confirming men in their sin. *Bishop Boyd Carpenter* takes a somewhat different view: "What does ver. 11 mean? Does it mean that the time is so short that it is hardly sufficient to allow of men reforming themselves so as to be ready for their Lord, and that, therefore, the lesson is: Let those who would be ready for Him remember that *now* is the day of salvation? This is the view adopted by some; it contains a truth, but the meaning of the verse seems more general. Is it not the declaration of the ever-terrible truth that men are building up their destiny by the actions and habits of their lives? 'Sow an act—reap a habit; sow a habit—reap a character; sow a character—reap a destiny.' The righteous become righteous; the godly become godly. So, slowly but surely, may the power of being masters of our fate pass out of our hands. It is in this law of our nature that the key to many of the darkest problems of the future may lie; and not without a solemn declaration of this law does the book of Revelation close."

SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND SERMON SKETCHES.

Ver. 2. *The Tree of Life.*—Here we may compare the homa-tree of the Persians, growing at the spring Ardvisura, which comes from the throne of God; the kalpasoma-tree of the Hindus, which furnished the water of immortality, the libation of the gods; the tuba-tree of the Arab; the lotus-tree of the Greeks; the tree of Assyrian sculpture, adorned by royal figures, and guarded by genii, just as, in the Bible-story, it is guarded by the cherubim . . . With the tree of knowledge we may compare the large part played by trees in Chaldean magic; the burning bush from which God's angel appeared to Moses; the oak of the diviners at Shechem; the palm-tree under which Deborah prophesied; the oak of Ophrah where an angel appeared to Gideon; the rustling in the tops of the balsam trees, which indicated to David that God had gone on before him in the battle; the prophetic trees of the Arabs; the "tree of light" of the Assyrian; the laurel-tree of Delos; the tree of Delphis.—*W. R. Harper.*

Ver. 4. "*The Vision of God.*"—The vision of God is threefold: the vision of righteousness; the vision of grace; the vision of glory.

I. **Righteousness includes all those attributes which make up an idea of the Supreme Ruler of the universe.**—Perfect justice, perfect truth, perfect purity, perfect moral harmony in all its aspects. It is a vision of awe, transcending all thought. A vision of awe, but a vision also of purification, of renewal, of energy, of power, of life.

II. **The vision of righteousness is succeeded by the vision of grace.** When Butler, in his dying moments had expressed his awe at appearing face to face before the moral Governor of the world, his chaplain, we

are told, spoke to him of the blood that cleanseth from all sin. "Ah, this is comfortable," he replied; and with these words on his lips he gave up his soul to God. He only has access to eternal love who has stood face to face with eternal righteousness. The incarnation of the Son is the mirror of His Father's love.

III. **The mirror of love melts into the vision of glory.**—Here we catch only glimpses at rare intervals, revealed in the lives of God's saints and heroes—revealed, above all, in the record of the written Word, and in the incarnation of the Divine Son. There we shall see Him face to face—perfect truth, perfect righteousness, perfect purity, perfect love, perfect light; and we shall gaze with unblenching eye, and our visage shall be changed. —*J. B. Lightfoot, D.D.*

Ver. 5. *The Royal State.*—The Church of the future is the theme of the latter part of the book of Revelation. One class of expositors asserts that the brilliant description of the New Jerusalem herein contained can only apply to the final glorified state of the Church in its heavenly home. Others think that the glowing figures represent the earthly prosperity of the Church when the Messiah shall reign among His people in His spiritual Person. As time is the interpreter of prophecy, we may rest assured that an agreement of view cannot be expected beforehand. We are inclined to regard the whole book as the last legacy of inspiration to the Militant Church, and that its prophecies relate to her earthly course. Taking the Bible generally, and the New Testament specially, in which we find the fuller revelation of immortality, the heavenly state is nowhere fully set forth. We may almost say that the references to heaven are mere hints, and not descriptions of that glorious state. It would appear strange, therefore, that the whole subject should be treated, and at such length, in the one book. But to regard the whole as a prophetic utterance, in the highest language of imagery, of the prosperity of the Church in its latter days, when all its struggles are over, is no strain upon either imagination or faith. Indeed, such a picture is welcome, as the calm is welcome after the storm. There was once a strife among the disciples: which of them should be accounted the greatest? This arose from the expectation, which then prevailed, that Jesus would set up again the throne of David, and restore the kingdom to Israel. The contention was, Which of the disciples should occupy the highest stations in the new kingdom? The historian has not given the claims which were preferred. The Book never satisfies mere curiosity. The Saviour's answer is given in full: "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority over them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." At first sight, the statement seems to sweep away every aspiration, and for a moment the disciples felt a keen disappointment. The tension was slackened when He further said, "I am among you as he that serveth." They had seen nothing in His treatment, either of themselves or others, which might lead to the thought that He was about to ascend the throne-steps. The one thing which they had seen—service—pointed in the opposite direction, as service was generally regarded. A life of constant toil and privation, which at times was violently assailed, had nothing in it to encourage the hope of wearing a crown and swaying a sceptre. Thus He brought the disciples down; but only to a level with Himself. He brought them down, however, to lift them up in another direction, yea, in an unexpected direction—that of service. The lift He gave them brought them up, not only near, but to the throne. "Ye are they which have continued with me in My temptations. And I appoint unto

you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me; that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." The language is figurative; but it points out to us that one truth, that service alone will satisfy the highest and noblest aspirations of the human heart. To do good is to reign with Christ in His kingdom. The text refers to a period when the service of the Church will be so great as to command universal approbation.

I. **The ascendency of the Christian character.**—"And they shall reign for ever and ever." Although the specific promise which the Saviour made, and which we have now quoted, indicates a favour to be bestowed on the twelve apostles, yet in the light of other Scriptures it cannot be so confined. The ascription of praise by the Church at the beginning of the book of Revelation, includes the idea: "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." Looking at the grand era of gospel ascendency which these chapters set forth, the prophet Daniel said, "And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers shall serve and obey him." Take also the words of St. Paul in Rom. v. 17: "For if by one offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." The same apostle also says in 2 Tim. ii. 12: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him." In the third chapter of this book and the last verse, we have this remarkable declaration: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne." And now we will look at some of the attributes of the Christian character, which will make its ascendency inevitable. 1. *Founded upon Christ.* Jesus Christ is its source. It partakes of the character of Christ: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. ii. 9). In the margin, for *praises* we have *virtues*, which is the more correct reading. Then let us think of those virtues which adorned the Saviour's life. There was an intense love of the truth. Purity marked every step. Benevolence flowed through the whole. If any one asks why the life of Jesus of Nazareth stands out pre-eminently, that is our answer. We do not stop to prove that truth, holiness, and love, are the imperishable materials with which to build up life, for the life of Jesus is our witness, which has stood the severest test for nearly two thousand years. We do not deny that other characters have outlived their generation, and have come down to us with much force, but we know that the indestructible elements in them are truth, honour, and goodness. Men who have distinguished themselves in one of these departments have created a life whose impetus overcomes the ravages of time. Above all others, the love of truth, the purity of example, and the love of man, are seen in the character of Christ. We do not think that His miracles, or even His tragic death, would have preserved His name independently of His teaching and loving-kindness. Jesus lives, not only in His heavenly mansion, but also in the lives of His followers, as He said, "Because I live, ye shall live also." The fact that Christians disseminate the light of truth, received from the Saviour, and are the salt of the earth in the morality of their life, with which they blend every effort to be the benefactors of their day and generation, assures us of the ascendency of their character. There is in truth an inherent force, before which ignorance and error must disappear. The truth, as it is in Jesus, is the power that

sways their thoughts. Truth is royal; its mandates are from the throne, and its influence must prevail. The Almighty has said over the darkness of mankind, "Let there be light," and there is light, which increases more and more unto the perfect day. If, again, we think of another force, concurrent with truth—the force of purity—in the nature of things it must gain the ascendency over sin. St. Paul sets forth the thought in Rom. v. 20, 21: "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." Righteousness is the foundation of all prosperity — personal and national. When the moral instincts of humanity are awakened by the gospel, it will become evident that sin is suicidal. Every Christian, therefore, brings this evidence against sin in the court of conscience; and we know what will ultimately be the verdict. We have already seen the overthrow of barbarous customs, evil habits, and many national sins. We confidently expect the day when "holiness unto the Lord" will be written on the bells of the horses. In the fact that the beneficial must become universal, we need not hesitate to believe. The Church witnesses for Christ in being His almoner to the world. Christianity's highest credentials are the many humane institutions which it has planted in every land. Every Christian is a boon to Society. Directly and indirectly his life is a benefit to others. His motto is to do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

2. *Inspired by the Holy Spirit.* If the character of Jesus is the basis of the Christian life, it may be questioned whether it is possible to maintain such a high ideal. Are we not all feeble imitators of a character which we cannot reproduce? This is very much the view which the world takes of the matter. It cannot be otherwise, because the force which sustains and inspires the Christian life is unperceived by mortal sense. The promise which the Blessed Lord gave His Church is worthy of fresh attention: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." The words may have a special application to the apostles, but it is also a promise of universal application to believers. The chronicler of the words, St. John, in the first epistle, says, "But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall know Him." By the anointing we are to understand the influence of the Holy Spirit, by which we know Christ; yea, it is the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us. The very birth of the Christian character is of the Spirit: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." When we bear in mind that Christians are daily under the power of the Holy Ghost, it is more than conceivable that they can reproduce the excellencies of the life of Jesus. We do not assert that this is always the case, because we often grieve the Spirit, and sometimes we quench the holy fire. But Christ is living now in His saints; they are enabled, in a measure, to set forth the truth, afford a holy example, and do the works of charity. The power which lifts the soul out of darkness into light, and cancels the bond of slavery by the new birth, can make the new life triumphant. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John v. 4, 5). Faith in Jesus Christ is an active principle, fired into action by the Holy Ghost. The influence is permanent, and not transitory, as the influence of the world:

"And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." St. Paul says, "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me." He received that strength in his spirit by communion with the Master. So also the weakest saint has power to rise above surrounding influences, for there dwells in his heart the Living Christ. To the world Jesus of Nazareth is only an historical character; one who acted His part, and on whose life the curtain of eternity fell; but, by virtue of the indwelling Spirit, the Christian has stepped before the curtain to continue the representation, and bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

II. **The distinction of the Christian character.**—We have said that the language of the text is figurative, but it is intended to convey the idea that those who love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ will be exalted. Human nature has aspirations. They have their legitimate place in our life. God has placed everything under our rule: "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet." Checked by the Fall, as we have it elsewhere—"But now we see not yet all things put under him"—the scope of man's action has been circumscribed. "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour." And where we see Jesus we also see His saints. It was His last prayer that His disciples should be with Him, to behold His glory. 1. *The elevation will be above the force of circumstances.* Every Christian on earth has to fight with difficulties. Life here is a struggle. We have to contend with evil influences: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." That day the strife will be over. The saints will look down from their thrones on the vanquished foes. Trials will be over, and mortality will be swallowed up of life. Death will have no sting, and the grave will be despoiled of victory. We shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved us, and gave Himself for us. Each will receive the crown of righteousness, which shall never fade. 2. *The elevation will be the highest to which God can raise us.* The idea of a throne and a kingdom suggests that the greatest honour will be conferred on the followers of Jesus. High as our aspirations may now be, they shall be more than fulfilled. Such a prospect calls upon us to be faithful, even unto death. Our life is brief in which to win a crown. The steps to the throne are many. Fight with sin; conform to the will of God; lead men to Christ, and build up the Church. Such a life has an upward tendency, and will continue its course until Jesus shall come.—"*Weekly Pulpit.*"

Ver. 11. *Permanency Stamped on Human Lives.*—Our condition in the coming life absolutely depends upon our conduct in the present life. "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." This has a most practical bearing. It crowds our present life with opportunities, and weightens every act of life with eternal relations.

I. **The present world is a world of change.**—The air we breathe seems to be always the same, and yet there is nothing so variable, so constantly altering its place and its constituents. Every blade of grass, every tree-leaf, is in the day-time taking something from it and adding something to it, and in the night-time reversing the order. The mountains seem to keep their place, but the truth is that the so-called "everlasting hills" are ever varying their forms, and weathering down into the plains. But the present changeableness of everything is hopeful, for it involves the possibility of moral

reformations. If Adam and his posterity had kept their integrity, the stamp of permanency might have been put on earth and life. As it is, the tree of life must be watchfully guarded, for the hope of humanity lies in the possibility of becoming other than it is. *Now* is the day of possible reformations. Now the prodigal may come back home and be again a son. Now the poor woman whose life-story is a tale of shame and sin may change into the penitent, pouring tears on the feet of Jesus and hearing words of gracious pardon. St. Paul may throw aside the old spirit of persecution and change into a preacher of the faith he once sought to destroy. "He that is unjust may become just, and he that is filthy may become holy."

II. **The future world is a world unchangeable.**—This earthly scene is pictured for us in the unrest of the sea. The future scene is pictured for us by the absence of the sea. "There shall be no more sea." Unchangeable! How nearly impossible it is, with our present ideas, to appreciate that word! There will be no change, because the people shall be all holy. God is unchangeable; but why? Because "all His works are done in truth." "Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints." "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." Then holiness must be the secret of our rest. We are to be first partakers of His holiness, and then partakers of His rest. But the unchangeableness of the future world is its woe, as well as its glory. To the Christian the thought of the unchangeable time is delightful, because his present distress is caused by the incompleteness and inconstancy of his righteousness now. St. Paul gloried in the future because he was to have a *crown* of righteousness; a *crown*, as the pledge and seal of established, perfected, eternal righteousness. But the thought of the unchangeable time is a distress to the man who is living in sin, for it means that reformation will be no longer possible. What he *is* he will *have to be*. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still;" he has fixed for himself his moral characteristics in his life-experience, and it must be stamped with the seal of eternity.

Ver. 17. *Water of Life.*—Some of the South Sea Islanders have a tradition of a river in their imaginary world of spirits, called the "Water of life." It was supposed that if the aged, when they died, went and bathed there, they became young, and returned to earth, to live another life over again.—*Turner's "Polynesia."*

The Perpetual Invitation.—"Every thing which God has made He treats according to the nature He has given it." A memory of this fundamental principle will greatly help us in our thoughts of God. A gross idea of omnipotence is a very constant source of misconception; but, in the nature of things, and according to the Scriptures also, there are certain *cannots* even to God. One of these cannots is: He cannot deny Himself. Now, if God should treat anything which He has made against the nature He has given it, that would be a denial of Himself. So, when I think of God's omnipotence, it is not right for me to think about it in any such way as to suppose that He could do anything which would deny what He had already done; I am rather to think of it as such Divine power as can do anything to anything according to the nature impressed by God upon that thing, and not otherwise. So God cannot treat a human soul as He would a stone; nor can He treat a human soul as He would an animal, for there is something belonging to the nature of the human soul that does not belong to the nature of animal or stone. Now, in what does this diverseness of human nature, which thus necessitates diverseness of Divine treatment, inhere? In many things, but eminently in this, that to man has been given by God the power of choice, and therefore God must treat a human soul, not as a

stone, nor as a horse, but as a something thus endowed with the power of a rational moral choice. So, if any man, as men are so apt to do, looking forth upon the material workings of the Divine hand, or upon its workings in realms lower than that in which man moves, should say, Surely God is omnipotent; surely I need not trouble myself about the management of my soul; surely if God means to convert me He can seize me in the grasp of His power and convert me, whether I will or no; surely I can go carelessly on, choosing the wrong, waiting for Him to *make* me choose right;—then that man thinks wrongly, and at his soul's peril, for he forgets that, since God cannot deny Himself, God must treat him according to the nature of the rational, moral, responsible soul he is. Upon that power of choice which God has given man, God will never, can never, rudely break. The Holy Spirit, powerful as are His influences, and helpless as we should be without them, never, in the slightest, *so* intrudes upon the integrity of our human, moral choices that they are not kept intact. So, then, this Scripture is the perpetual appeal and invitation of God to us to come to Him, to accept Him. 1. The Spirit says, "Come." The impact of the Divine Spirit upon the human spirit is perpetually asserted in the Scriptures. 2. The Church says, "Come," by its existence, by its doctrine, by its examples, by the Scripture on which it is founded, and which it, in turn, holds forth and declares. 3. He who *hears* may say, "Come." Christianity is democratic. A man need not wait for the calling of any priestly and separated class. 4. But there is a call internal. He that is *athirst* may come. Our spiritual longings are the internal invitations to God. 5. And whosoever *Will*—it hinges there. And *freely* if you will.—*Anon.*

Vers. 20, 21. *The Last Words of the New Testament.*—St. John did not know that he was closing the canon. If he had known, he could not have closed it more appropriately. The vision granted to him seems to rapidly sketch the ages of the Christian dispensation. It seems to indicate the various forces which, taking various shapes, would put the Christian faith and the Christian Church in peril. The last words gather up two things: the cheering message of the Church's Lord; and the proper attitude for the Church to preserve.

I. **Christ's last message to His Church.**—"Surely I come quickly." We have to keep ever in mind two thoughts concerning Christ's relations with His Church. 1. Christ is always (all the days) with His Church. 2. Christ is now, sensibly, absent from His Church. Both are true. Meeting the latter we have the promise, "Lo, I come quickly." Messiah is coming. That was the great hope held before the ancient saints. And the promise was fulfilled. But the fulfilment came in God's time, not in their time; in God's way, not in their way; for God's purposes, and not for theirs. Christ is coming. That is the great hope ever inspiring the saints of these later days. But our conceptions may be no nearer the truth than were the conceptions of the ancient saints. He may not come just at the time that we fix, in the way that we plan, or for the precise purposes that we imagine. There is, indeed, some sense in which He is coming *quickly*. He is making no needless delay. We say, "O Lord, how long?" He says, "Quickly." And we should be continually braced up by the thought that it may be *even now*. Of this much we may be well assured: He will come for—(1) inspection of work; (2) reward of work; (3) trust of higher service.

II. **Man's last response to the Church's Lord.**—"Amen. Come!" The attitude is one of expectancy and desire. The Church ever wants to have her Lord sensibly nearer. The tone in which we daily say, "Lord Jesus, come quickly," is the revelation of our spiritual state and condition. 1. If we are fainting with the weariness

of continued work, there will be no bright tone in our soul-cry, "Come." 2. If we are giving way to unbelief, the soul-voice will be, at least temporarily, silenced. 3. If we are neglecting our spiritual duties, we shall have no heart to cry, "Come." 4. If we are allowing ourselves to be overmastered by the worldly spirit, we shall even find that we are praying *against* His coming. Can you say, "Lord Jesus, come quickly," "Amen. Come"? Can you say it right, and with the right tone? With the solemn judgment-figure in your mind, can you say it? With the glorious coronation-figure in your mind, can you say it? It is no cry to be kept for the death-hour. It is the soul-cry of every hour, when the soul is truly "alive unto God."

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